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ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition

Salam Rassi

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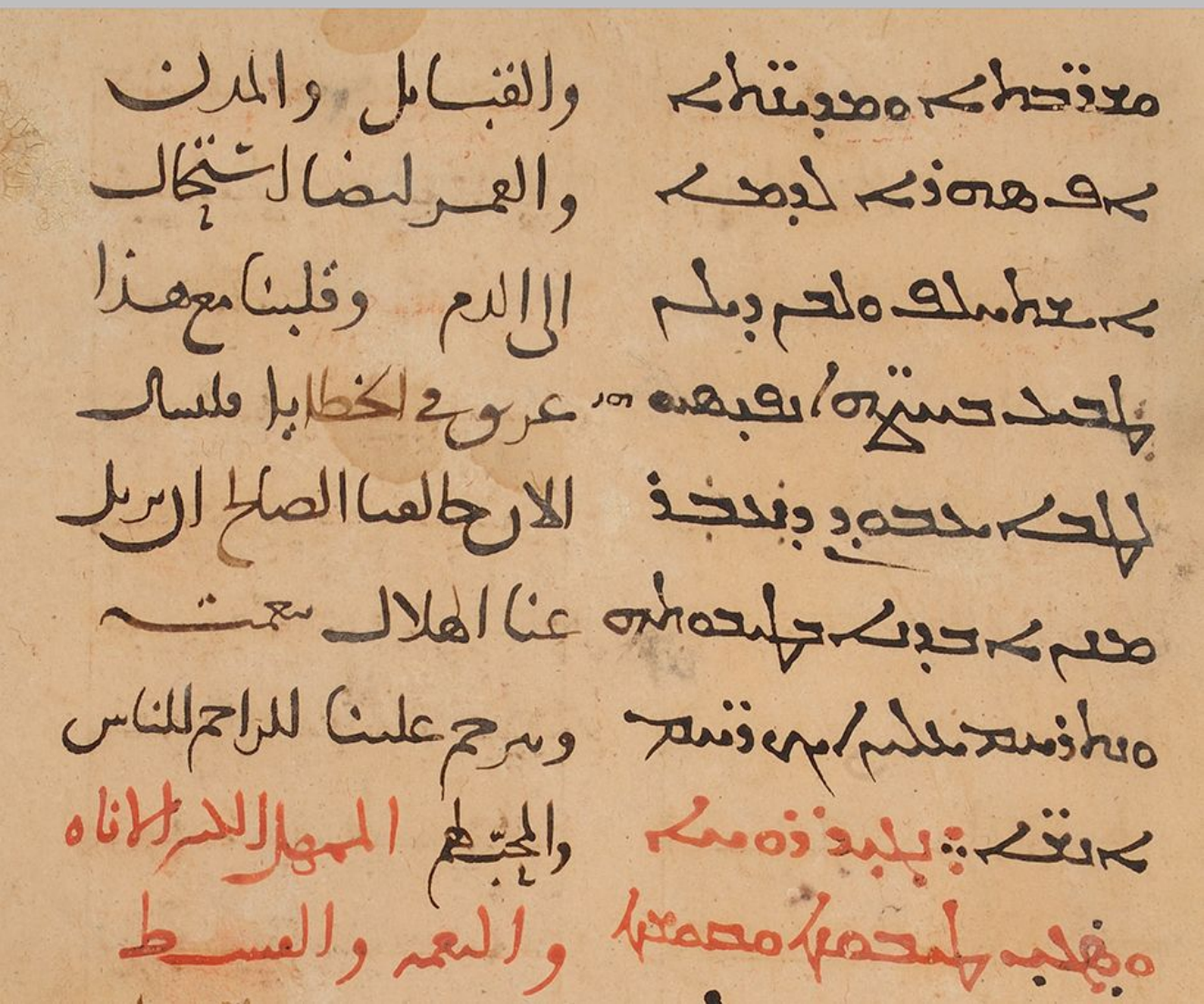

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Note on Conventions and Abbreviations

All Arabic terms, names, and phrases have been rendered according to the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) system of transliteration. For the Syriac I have used a single method of transliteration for East and West Syrian pronunciation. As such, I have employed conventions governing soft and hard consonants (*rukkāḵa* and *quššāyā*) as stipulated by the medieval East Syrian grammatical tradition. This includes retaining the hard *pē* (e.g., *naqqīpūṯā*) in all instances except in certain cases such as *napšā* (pronounced *nawšā*).[1] All other letters subject to spirantization have been softened where appropriate, e.g., *ḥḏāyūṯā*. However, for the sake of those unspecialized in the Syriac language, I have avoided these conventions where personal names are concerned, thus ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā not ʿAḇdīšōʿ bar Brīḵā.

To avoid cluttering the text with multiple dating systems, I have chosen to use Common Era in most instances. In a few cases, however, 'A.G.' is given for *anno graecorum* and 'A.H.' for *anno hegirae*. As for Christian personal names, I have tended to employ Romanized and Anglicized forms of Greek-origin names that appear in Syriac (e.g., 'Theodore' instead of 'Tēʾwādōrōs' or 'Nestorius' instead of 'Nesṭōrīs'). Names of Semitic origin have been left in place (e.g., 'Yahbalāhā' and 'Īshōʿdād'), with the exception of widely used Anglicized forms of Biblical names such as 'Jacob' and 'Ephrem'. Place names conform to their pre-modern usage, thus Āmid instead of Diyarbakır, Mayyāfaraqīn instead of Silvan, etc., though well-known cities like Aleppo, Damascus, and Baghdad have been normalized throughout.

[1] Georges Bohas, *Les bgdkpt en syriaque selon Bar Zoʿbî* (Toulouse: Amam-Cemaa, 2005), 10–11. For an up-to-date comparison between East and West Syrian systems of phonology and transcription, see Stephanie Rudolf and Michael Waltisberg, 'Phonologie und Transkription des Syrischen,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 170, no. 1 (2020): 19–46.

Abbreviations used for ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's works are as follows:

Durra	*I fondamenti della religione (*Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn*)*. Edited and translated by Gianmaria Gianazza. Bologna: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018.
Catalogue	*Catologus Auctorum Abdišoʾ /Fihris al-muʾallifīn taʾlif li-ʿAbd Yashūʿ al-Ṣūbāwī*. Edited and translated by Yūsuf Ḥabbī. Baghdad: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1986.
Farāʾid	*Farāʾid al-fawāʾid fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-l-ʿaqāʾid.* In Gianmaria Gianazza. *Testi teologico di Ebedjesu*, 39–227. Bologna: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018.
Khuṭba	*Khuṭba fī al-tathlīth wa-l-tawḥīd*. In Gianmaria Gianazza. *Testi teologici di Ebedjesu*, 233–247. *Bologna*: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018.
Nomocanon	*The Nomocanon of Abdisho of Nisibis: A Facsimile Edition of MS 64 from the Collection of the Church of the East in Trissur*. Edited by István Perczel, 2nd ed. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.
Paradise	*Pardaysā da-ʿḏen*. Edited by Joseph De Kelaita. Mosul: Maṭbaʿṯā ʾAṯōrāytā d-ʿEdtā d-Maḏnḥa, 1928.
Pearl	*Kṯāḇā d-margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵresṭyānūṯā*. In Joseph De Kelaita. *Ktāḇā d-meṭqre margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵresṭyānūṯā da-ʿḇīḏ l-Mār(y) ʿAḇdīšōʿ mīṭrāpōlīṭā d-Ṣōḇā wa-ḏ-ʾArmānīyā, ʿam kunnāšā d-mēmrē mawtrānē*. 2nd ed., 2–99. Mosul: Maṭbaʿṯā ʾĀṯorāytā d-ʿEdtā ʿAttīqtā d-Maḏnḥā, 1924.
Profession	*Amāna*. In Gianmaria Gianazza. *Testi teologico di Ebedjesu*, 251–262. Bologna: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018.
Ṭukkāsā	*Ebedjesus von Nisibis „Ordo iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum„: Eine Zusammenstellung der kirchlichen Rechtsbestimmungen der ostsyrischen Kirche im 14. Jahrhundert*. Edited and translated by Hubert Kaufhold. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019.

NB: All translations from ʿAbdīshōʿ's works are mine unless stated otherwise.
Abbreviations and acronyms for frequently cited materials are:

CEDRAC	Centre de documentation et de recherches arabes chrétiennes.
CMR 1–5 (2010–13)	*Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*. 5 vols. Edited by David Thomas and Alex Mallet. Leiden: Brill, 2010–2013.
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.
EI²	*Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs. Leiden: Brill, 1954–2005.
EI³	*Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*. Edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Leiden: Brill, 2007–.
EQ	*Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*. Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006.

GAL	Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*. 2 vols. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1943–1949.
GCAL	Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*. 5 vols. Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944–1953.
GEDSH	*Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*. Edited by Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz, and Lucas Van Rompay. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011.
GSL	Anton Baumstark. *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß Der christlich-palästinensischen Texte*. Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Webers, 1922.
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*
Majmūʿ	Ibn al-ʿAssāl, al-Muʾtaman. *Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn wa-masmūʿ maḥṣūl al-yaqīn/umma dei principi della religion*. Translated and edited by Wadi Abullif. 2 vols. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Fransīskānī li-l-Dirāsāt al-Sharqiyya al-Masīḥiyya wa-Maṭbaʿat al-Ābāʾ al-Fransīsiyyīn.
Seize traités	Louis Cheikho (ed.). *Seize traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens (ixe–xiiie siècle)*. Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1904.
Vingt traités	Paul Sbath (ed.). *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIVe siècle*. Cairo: Imprimerie Syrienne Héliopolis, 1929.

Introduction: 'A Constant but not Frozen Tradition'

Following the siege of Acre by the Mamluks in 1291, the last Crusader stronghold in Palestine finally fell, never to be recovered. The eventual Muslim reconquest of the Crusader-held cities along the Levantine coast led to successive waves of migrations across the Mediterranean. By the second half of the thirteenth century, the island of Cyprus had become home to communities of Arabic-speaking Christians from various ecclesial traditions known variously as 'Syrian', 'Jacobite', and 'Maronite'.[1] Many had arrived after the fall of Crusader Byblos, Acre, and Tripoli, and settled in the city of Famagusta (known as Māghūṣa in Arabic), while others had arrived during earlier periods of migration. Amid this panoply of confessions was the Church of the East, Christians of the East Syrian rite known also as 'Nestorians'.[2] Later waves of migration would bolster the numbers of this community, some of whom had already established themselves as a successful merchant class.[3]

Though subject to Frankish Lusignan rule, many members of the Church of the East in Cyprus refused to submit to the authority of the Latin Archbishop of Nicosia and instead maintained a distinct ecclesial identity.[4] Among their representatives was Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, a priest from the city of Mosul. In 1332, while residing in Famagusta, Ṣalībā wrote a vast theological compendium in Arabic

[1] Peter W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades 1191–1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101; Christopher Schabel, 'Religion,' in *Cyprus: Society and Culture 1191–1374*, ed. Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Christopher Schabel (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 157–218, esp. 164–166.

[2] The Assyro-Chaldean churches of today reject the appellation 'Nestorian' due to its heresiological associations with Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople. Although 'Abdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā generally refers to his ecclesial community as that of the 'Easterners' (*maḏnḥāyē* in Syriac/*mashāriqa* in Arabic), he employs the term 'Nestorian' by way of self-definition in other contexts (on which see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2). As such, I have chosen to use the term 'Nestorian' in a non-pejorative manner, alongside other descriptors such as 'East Syrian'. For more background on the naming debate of the Church of the East, see Sebastian P. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,' in *The Church of the East: Life and Thought*, ed. James F. Coakley and Kenneth Parry (Manchester: John Rylands University Library, 1996), 23–35; Nikolai Seleznyov, 'Nestorius of Constantinople: Condemnation, Suppression, Veneration,' *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 62, no. 3–4 (2010): 165–190.

[3] Jean Richard, 'La confrérie des Mosserins d'Acre et les marchands de Mossoul au XIIIe siècle', *Oriens Syrianus* 11 (1966): 451–460; idem, 'Le Peuplement Latin et syrien en Chypre au XIIIe siècle,' *Byzantinische Forschungen* 7 (1979): 157–173, esp. 166–167.

[4] For 'Syrian' resistance to the *Bulla Cypria* promulgated in 1260, see Nicholas Coureas, *The Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195–1312* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 302ff.

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known as the *Asfār al-asrār* ('The Books of Mysteries').[5] Woven into this work are chapters from a compendium by an older contemporary of Ṣalībā named ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, metropolitan of Nisibis (d. 1318). Alongside ʿAbdīshōʿ feature other works in Arabic by Nestorian theologians, namely Elias bar Shennāyā (d. 1046), Makkīkhā (d. 1109), Elias ibn Muqlī (d. 1131), and Īshōʿyahb bar Malkon (d. 1246).[6] In the same work we find Ṣalībā's continuation of a history of the patriarchs of the Church of the East from the *Kitāb al-majdal fī al-istibṣār wa-l-jadal* ('Book of the Tower on Observation and Debate'), a *summa theologica* by ʿAmr ibn Mattā (fl. late tenth/early eleventh centuries).[7] Three years later, in 1336, whilst still in Famagusta, Ṣalībā completed a manuscript of theological miscellany, this time containing ʿAbdīshoʿ's Arabic translation of the Gospel lectionary and his sermon on the Trinity and Incarnation, both in rhymed prose, together with an anti-Muslim apology, the so-called *Letter from the People of Cyprus*, composed anonymously on the island some years previously.[8]

Ṣalībā's compilatory activities suggest that by the first half of the fourteenth century a rich corpus of theological, liturgical, and historiographical literature in the Arabic language had emerged within the Church of the East. Syriac, the Church of the East's *lingua sacra*, remained an active part of the Nestorian Cypriot community's ecclesial identity.[9] Yet, after centuries in Muslim lands

[5] Four out of five books (*asfār*) of this work have been edited; see Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā al-Mawṣilī, *Asfār al-asrār*, ed. Gianmaria Gianazza, 2 vols. (Beirut: CEDRAC, 2018–2018). For a translation of the entire five books, see idem, *I Libri Dei Misteri*, tr. Gianmaria Gianazza (Rome: Aracne, 2017).

[6] al-Mawṣilī, *I Libri dei misteri*, 2.2 (Elias II); 2.6 (Elias of Nisibis); 2.11–12 (ʿAbdīshoʿ); 2.8, 2.14 (Makkīkhā); 2.13 (Ibn Malkōn). Other Christian Arabic authors from the East Syrian tradition, whose floruits are uncertain, include George, metropolitan of Mosul (ibid., 2.7) and Michael, bishop of Āmid (ibid., 2.9). For a survey of these authors and their works as they appear in Ṣalībā's anthology, see Herman G.B. Teule, 'A Theological Treatise by Īšoʿyahb bar Malkon in the Theological Compendium *Asfār al-asrār*', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58, no. 3–4 (2006): 235–258, here 240, 242 and 13–18.

[7] Gustav Westphal and, later, Georg Graf considered Ṣalībā's inclusion of the historical chapter of the *Majdal* in his own work to be an act plagiarism; Gustav Westphal, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen und die Glaubwürdigkeit der Patriarchenchroniken des Mari ibn Sulaiman, ʿAmr ibn Matai und Saliba ibn Johannan* (Kirchhain: Max Schmersow, 1901) and *GCAL*, 2: 217. Scholars have since revised this claim and now accept Ṣalībā as the continuator—*not* the author—of the *Majdal*'s patriarchal history. For a summary of the debate, see Bo Holmberg, 'A Reconsideration of the *Kitāb al-mağdal*,' *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993): 255–273, esp. 260–267.

[8] For Ṣalībā's holograph of this compilation, see Gérard Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes. Manuscrits chrétiens*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1972), 172–173. The *Letter from the People of Cyprus* itself is a recension of an earlier apology by the Melkite bishop of Sidon, Paul of Antioch; see David Thomas, 'The Letter from the People of Cyprus,' *CMR* 4 (2012): 769–772.

[9] Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā argues in his *Asfār al-asrār* that Syriac was the language of Adam—an argument that appears as early as Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373). According to Ṣalībā, Syriac's status as a primordial language is evidence of the ancient faith of the Christians of the East (*al-mashāriqa*) against those 'newer' confessions; al-Mawṣilī, *al-Asfār al-asrār*, 1:305 (text), idem, *I Libri dei misteri*, 135 (trans.). Commitment to Syriac, at least liturgically, is also suggested by surviving murals in the church of St George the Exiler in Famagusta, once thought to belong to the Nestorians but more likely to be Maronite, Jacobite, or Syrian Melkite; Michele Bacci, 'Syrian, Palaiologan, and Gothic Murals in the "Nestorian" Church of Famagusta,' *Δελτίον της χριστιανικής αρχαιολογικής εταιρείας* 27 (2006): 207–220.

prior to reaching their adoptive Cyprus, the Nestorian community could boast of a wealth of writers who in the early centuries of the Abbasid era (750–ca. 950) inaugurated a rich tradition of Christian theology in the Arabic language. This emergent literature was characterized as much by a need to answer Muslim and Jewish challenges to Christianity as to educate the faithful about the foundations of their religion.[10] It was a tradition that continued to find expression among subsequent authors, not least by those memorialized in Ṣalībā's theological anthologies. For even in Cyprus, where Arabophone Christians lived apart from their erstwhile non-Christian neighbours in the Middle East, the Arabic language continued to function as a vehicle for their articulation of Christian identity. This book examines those very authors whom Ṣalībā saw as emblematic of this theological tradition, with a special focus on the poet, canonist, and alchemical writer, ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā.

At this point, we should note that modern scholars have paid scarce attention to most of the above-mentioned authors, least of all to ʿAbdīshōʿ. Few have studied him in light of his theology, much of which, as we shall see throughout this book, he composed with an apologetic[11] purpose in mind, and which found expression through a variety of genres, from rhymed prose to verse exposition. Instead, ʿAbdīshōʿ is chiefly remembered as a cataloguer and compiler by modern scholars, many of whom frequently trawl his works for information about earlier periods of Christian literature. Fewer still have fully appreciated ʿAbdīshōʿ's bilingualism, viewing him as an author who wrote mainly in Syriac while editions of his Arabic works have only recently appeared. Moreover, many scholars have viewed the opening centuries of the Abbasid caliphate as the most creative period of Christian–Muslim theological exchange, after which Christian theology became stagnant, repetitive, and unimaginative. Consequently, a far greater importance has been ascribed to a 'formative phase' of theology which neglects the tradition's later development and reception. Conversely, some have argued that ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote at the height of a 'Syriac Renaissance' and that it was only after his death in 1318 that a period of decline crept in.

My aim in this book is not to determine the precise date of Syriac Christianity's 'Dark Age' (if indeed there ever was one), nor is it to argue for a period of renaissance. As we shall see further in this study, both historiographical categories—'decline' and 'renaissance'—are highly problematic lenses through which to study the history of any intellectual tradition. Rather, my purpose is to go beyond narratives of decline and revival by asking: if Syriac Christianity's most creative period of engagement with Islamic theology ended after the early Abbasid

[10] More will be said of this emergence in Chapter 1.
[11] I qualify my use of the term 'apologetic' in Chapter 1.

period, why, then, did Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā see fit to compile the apologetics of so many later writers?

At the end of his history of Christian theology in the Muslim world, Sydney Griffith remarks that after having undergone a 'formative' phase in the ninth century, during which the 'main lines of Christian thought in the Arabic-speaking, Islamic milieu were drawn', the theological idiom of Christians would become 'constant but not frozen'.[12] It is in *this* spirit that I intend to examine the intellectual output of later medieval Christian writers living in the Islamic world. To test my hypothesis of a constant yet unfrozen theological tradition, I will focus my enquiry on the hitherto neglected writings of ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā (also known as ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis). In doing so I wish to demonstrate that the advent of Islam did more than shape an anti-Muslim apologetic agenda among Christians; it also led to the development of a rich and complex theological language among Christians of all stripes living under Muslim rule. Though responsive to Muslim theological challenges, this tradition was itself shaped and conditioned by the cultural, linguistic, and even religious fabric of the Islamicate societies in which it developed. This book seeks to show how by the thirteenth century, Arabic and its attendant literary canon served as an important site of intellectual production for many Christian writers, among whom ʿAbdīshoʿ was no exception. The output of Arabic-using Christian authors exhibits a remarkable level of engagement with the culture of their day, giving new and productive meaning to long-established theological ideas.

Yet, as I hope to also illustrate, ʿAbdīshoʿ tempered this interculturality with a stated preference for the Syriac language, for centuries a vehicle of ecclesiastical instruction and liturgy in the Church of the East. As mentioned already, ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote prolifically in Syriac as well as Arabic. In fact, his poetic and legal works in the former would go on to enjoy a high degree of popularity among Syriac Christians in subsequent centuries, and today's Assyro-Chaldean Christians still consider him among their most eminent doctors. In this book, I will explore the various points of contact and divergence between ʿAbdīshoʿ's Syriac and Arabic writings, since both are essential to our understanding of his position as one of the most influential figures in the history of the Church of the East. By focusing on ʿAbdīshoʿ bar Brīkhā, this book examines the very genre of apologetics and its foremost significance among Christians living in Islamicate environments. By disentangling the complex layers of source material that characterize the genre, this book attempts to situate Christian apologetics within a broader intellectual history of the medieval Islamicate world.

[12] Sydney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 177, citing the year 950 as the end of Islam's formative period, *apud* W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 316.

My first chapter ('Authority, Compilation, and the Apologetic Tradition') sets out the theoretical and methodological framework of this study. It begins by outlining the Syriac-language works for which ʿAbdīshōʿ is chiefly known, followed by an inventory of his extant writings. Having established these preliminaries, I go on to survey his five main theological works, together with important aspects of their literary afterlife. Three of these works comprise encyclopaedic summaries of church doctrine and are responsive to non-Christian critiques of Christianity. After reviewing what little scholarship these texts have occasioned, I outline an approach to ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic oeuvre that considers their genre, language, composition, subject matter, and audience. This means elaborating some definitions by asking: if ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology is apologetic in the main, then how do we define apologetics? How are such works distinct from polemics, an interdependent category? And how were such categories understood by premodern Syriac and Christian Arabic authors? In addition to delineating the genre of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology, this chapter will also discuss its encyclopaedic nature. I argue that while his apologetics might appear as a patchwork of earlier source material, the practice of compilation was in fact part of a centuries-long catechetical tradition. Common to many churches under Muslim rule, this tradition sought to uphold and sustain a stable canon of dogma and, consequently, a distinct religious identity. In order to better understand this practice on its own hermeneutical terms, this chapter will establish a typology for such Syriac and Christian Arabic theological compendia, or *summae*. In doing so, I will discuss the various kinds of religious authority that ʿAbdīshōʿ sought to affirm through his apologetics. In addition to patristic and late antique theological traditions, our author also draws from earlier medieval Arabic Christian authors—authors whose ideas were forged in response to and in conversation with Islam. I will also explore points of contact and divergence between the types of apologetics that ʿAbdīshōʿ produced and comparable genres in the Islamicate world, both Christian and non-Christian. Situating such works in what scholars have variously termed a 'shared lettered tradition', an 'intellectual *koinē*', and a 'religious cosmopolitan language', I make the case that ʿAbdīshōʿ's defence of Christianity is at once rooted in symbols and motifs common to Muslims while simultaneously setting Christians apart from them. As such, this chapter will discuss intersections between language, literature, and identity in ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics, with a focus on notions of Christian belonging and exclusion.

Chapter 2 ('The Life and Times of a "Most Obscure Syrian"') explores our author's world based on his own testimonies and those of his contemporaries. While we possess few facts about his life, the cultural, political, and intellectual history of the Church of the East in the thirteenth century is relatively well-documented. ʿAbdīshōʿ's literary activities took place at the height of Mongol rule over a region of Upper Mesopotamia known as the Jazīra. The destruction of the Baghdad Caliphate in 1258 and the subsequent establishment of the Ilkhanate

inaugurated four decades or so of non-Muslim rule by mainly Shamanist and Buddhist sovereigns over a largely Muslim region. In 1295, the Mongol elite in the Middle East officially converted to Islam. This development had far reaching consequences for the region's non-Muslim population and may have informed our author's anti-Muslim apologetics. I also situate ʿAbdīshōʿ's literary output in a period during which Syriac and Arabic Christian scholarship was becoming increasingly indebted to Islamic theological and philosophical models. While ʿAbdīshōʿ's own involvement in the broader intellectual networks of his day appears limited, his work on alchemy evinces a high level of engagement with Arabo-Islamic modes of knowledge production. This receptiveness to non-Christian models is less obvious in ʿAbdīshōʿ's other works but is nevertheless present in his apologetics.

Having established ʿAbdīshōʿ in his time and place, Chapter 3 ('The One is Many and the Many are One: ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian Thought') explores his writings on the Trinity, a key Christian tenet that many Muslim polemicists believed to be a form of tritheism. This charge was levelled repeatedly in the centuries leading up to ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, prompting Christian apologists to demonstrate that God was a unitary being without denying His triune nature. In line with earlier authors, ʿAbdīshōʿ begins by establishing the existence of the world and its temporal origins from a single, infinite cause, which he infers from the orderliness and composite nature of the cosmos. He then argues that this cause must possess three states of intellection identical to its essence, while affirming the three Trinitarian Persons as essential attributes in a single divine substance. While these strategies owe much to earlier apologies, ʿAbdīshōʿ frames them in a technical language that resonates with aspects of the philosophized Muslim theology (*kalām*) of his day by making use of Avicennian expressions of God as Necessary Being. But rather than simply borrowing from Islamic systems, our author demonstrates that the issues raised by Muslims concerning the Trinity could be resolved internally, that is, through recourse to scripture and the authority of earlier Christian thinkers.

A theme closely connected to the issue of God's unicity is the Incarnation, discussed in Chapter 4 ('Debating Natures and Persons: ʿAbdīshōʿ's Contribution to Christology'). Central to ʿAbdīshōʿ's defence of this doctrine is the argument that Christ possessed a divine and a human nature, each united in a single person. For Muslim polemicists such a notion was further proof of Christianity's denial of God's transcendence, leading ʿAbdīshōʿ to make a case for the Incarnation's rootedness in both reason and revelation. As in his Trinitarian doctrine, our author appeals to a theological and literary vocabulary shared between Arabic-reading Christians and Muslims. Nevertheless, he explicitly cites Christian authorities, suggesting that it is to the language of Islamic theology rather than its substance that he wishes to appeal. With that said, ʿAbdīshōʿ does not merely instrumentalize this language for the sake of apologetics. By employing poetic and

narrative techniques shared between Christian and Muslim literatures, our author supplies renewed meaning and relevance to the mystery of the Incarnation and the Biblical story of Christ's mission. In particular, I look at ʿAbdīshōʿ's engagement with the Sufi language of ecstatic union and possible correspondences between his narrativization of Jesus's life and the Buddhist-derived Arabic legend of Bilawhar and Būdhāsaf. In contrast to his Trinitarian dogma, which appears uniformly directed against external criticisms, aspects of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology are grounded in intra-Christian polemics, since various Christian confessions under Islamic rule were for centuries divided over the issue of Christ's natures. Later in life, however, ʿAbdīshōʿ skilfully negotiated this vexed theological inheritance to formulate a Christology that was no longer hostile to other Christians.

The final chapter of this book ('Christian Practices, Islamic Contexts: Discourses on the Cross and Clapper') examines ʿAbdīshōʿ's justification of Christian devotional practice. In particular, I examine his discussion of the veneration of the Cross and the striking of a wooden percussion instrument known as the clapper, used in the call to prayer.[13] In line with earlier apologists, ʿAbdīshōʿ's explanation of Christian cult affirms its validity in a socio-cultural environment that was sometimes at odds with it. Here, I situate ʿAbdīshōʿ's apology within a contested visual and acoustic environment shared in by Muslims and Christians. Christian writers in the Islamicate world often contended with the accusation that the veneration and public display of the Cross constituted a form of idolatry, and that the sound of the clapper in times of prayer was offensive to Muslims and inferior to the call of the *muʾadhdhin*. In addition to providing scriptural testimony for the veneration of the Cross, our author appeals to a *kalām*-inflected language to explain the salvific function of the Crucifixion and the cosmological significance of the Cross's four points. Similarly, he invokes an instance where the call of the clapper features positively in a poetic sermon attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661), thereby invoking a common lettered tradition to legitimate an otherwise marginal practice. Although the tradition pertains to ʿAlī, a foundational figure in Islam, ʿAbdīshōʿ employs the sermon to illustrate how Christian sacred tradition—in this case, the apocryphal story of Noah's use of the clapper to signal salvation from the Flood—is consonant with Muslim models of piety and repentance. Moreover, ʿAlī's resonance in the Christian imaginary was also trans-linguistic, since many of the ethical and moralizing themes in his sermon emerge in ʿAbdīshōʿ's Syriac poetry.

[13] My use of the term 'clapper' will be fully qualified in Chapter 5.

1

Authority, Compilation, and the Apologetic Tradition

> Tatian, a philosopher, having gathered in his intellect the sense of the words of the blessed Evangelists and when he impressed in his mind the meaning of their divine scripture, compiled (*kneš*) a single admirable Gospel from the four of them, which he named the *Diatessaron*, in which he observed the accurate order (*seḏrā ḥattīṯā*) of all that was said and done by the Saviour, entirely without adding to it even a single word from his own authority (*men dīleh*). [This] model seemed appropriate to me when those who hold the rudders of church governance—admirable, illustrious, great, pure, and good beyond recompense—ordered me to put an end, through study, to this life of idleness and neglect in order to benefit the community and myself.
>
> ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Nomocanon*[1]

So writes ʿAbdīshōʿ in the preface to his *Nomocanon*, a collection of ecclesiastical laws written sometime in the thirteenth century. Comparing himself to Tatian, the second-century creator of the famous Gospel harmony, ʿAbdīshōʿ disavows any pretence of innovation, claiming only to preserve the 'suitable order and correct sequence' (*seḏrā w-ṭaḵsā d-lāḥem*) of the texts that had come down to him, so as not to 'defile the sanctity of the Fathers with the wretchedness of my own thoughts'.[2] Such performances of humility were commonplace in late antique and medieval prefatory writing, wherein the author renounced any claim to novelty while affirming a venerable and (purportedly) unchanging tradition.[3] As

[1] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *The Nomocanon of Abdisho of Nisibis: A Facsimile Edition of MS 64 from the Collection of the Church of the East in Trissur*, ed. István Perczel, 2nd ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 1–2, hereafter *Nomocanon*. Translated in Hubert Kaufhold, introduction to *The Nomocanon of Abdisho of Nisibis: A Facsimile Edition of MS 64 from the Collection of the Church of the East in Trissur*, ed. István Perczel, 2nd ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), xv–xlvi, here xxxvi (modified).

[2] *Nomocanon*, 3 (text); Kaufhold, introduction, xxxvii (trans.).

[3] For examples from Patristic literature, see Sébastien Morlet, 'Aux origines de l'argument patristique? Citation et autorité dans le *Contre Marcel* d'Eusèbe', in *On Good Authority: Tradition, Compilation and the Construction of Authority in Literature from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Reinhart Ceulemans and Pieter De Leemans (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 69–94. For this topos in Syriac prefatory writing in particular, see Eva Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1988), 169.

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we shall see in this study, a similar tendency is evident throughout ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic works in which he synthesizes earlier arguments and authorities. As such, the cultural and historical context of his work may not be immediately evident to us. Nevertheless, a contextual, integrative, and genre-sensitive study should help us shed light on an important intellectual tradition that lay at the centre of his enterprise.

Since many historians will be unfamiliar with ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, this chapter begins by taking stock of his major works and important aspects of their reception history. Then, having established the contours of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic oeuvre, I will address some salient issues surrounding past scholarship on the history of Christian–Muslim relations and Syriac and Arabic Christian literature more broadly. Finally, I will attend to some notoriously knotty questions, namely, what are apologetics? Do apologetics comprise a distinct genre and if so, did medieval Syriac and Arabic Christian writers recognize it as such? What role does ʿAbdīshōʿ's Syro-Arabic bilingualism play in his oeuvre? Who were these texts' audiences and what connections do their compositional features have to other genres? What was the texture of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics and which modes of religious authority most concerned him? If we accept that ʿAbdīshōʿ's working method was of a compilatory bent, how might we benefit by disentangling the many layers of his apologetics? And lastly, which topics comprise the bulk of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics and which form the basis of this study? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions by situating ʿAbdīshōʿ's thought within a distinctly medieval tradition of theological writing that was one of the prime sites of Christian identity in the pre-modern Islamic world.

1.1 ʿAbdīshōʿ as Cataloguer, Jurist, and Theological Poet

Before considering the entire breadth of ʿAbdīshōʿ's works, let us first turn to those that are best known and most accessible to scholars. These have tended to be in the Syriac language, chief among them a catalogue (or index) of ecclesiastical authors, a compilation of canon law, and a book of theological poetry—all of which are vastly popular in today's Assyrian and Chaldean milieus. Included among them is a theological primer entitled *Kṯāḇā d-Margānīṯā* ('The Book of the Pearl'). Since this work contains a strong apologetic dimension, I will address it alongside ʿAbdīshōʿ's other apologetic works, on which more below.

We begin with the *Mēmrā d-ʾīṯ beh menyānā d-ḵolhōn kṯāḇē ʿedtānāyē* ('Treatise Containing the Enumeration of all Ecclesiastical Books'), variously referred to in English as *The Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Authors, Metrical Catalogue of Syriac Writers*, or simply *Catalogue of Authors* (henceforth

Catalogue).[4] The work is a list of Christian writers and their works up to ʿAbdīshōʿ's own day and is divided into four principal parts: (i) the books of the Old Testament and apocrypha; (ii) the scriptures of the New Testament; (iii) the books of the Greek Fathers, that is, those from the Patristic Era known to ʿAbdīshōʿ in Syriac translation; (iv) and the writings of the Syriac—mainly East Syrian—Fathers. Composed in heptasyllabic verse and numbering 595 strophes, the *Catalogue* was first 'discovered' in early modern Europe by the Rome-based Maronite scholar Abraham Ecchelensis (Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāqilānī), who produced its first printed edition in 1653.[5] It was to have an enormous impact on the development of early-modern Orientalism: as Jeff Childers has observed, the *Catalogue* 'helped clarify for western scholarship the breadth and basic contours of Syriac literature, providing stimulus and some direction of Syriac literary history in the West'.[6] William Wright declared the *Catalogue* to be ʿAbdīshōʿ's 'most useful work decidedly',[7] and Peter Kawerau later described it as 'a literary-historical source of the first order'.[8] It also provided the basis of the third volume of Joseph Assemani's foundational reference work of Syriac literature, the *Biblioteca Orientalis*, in 1725,[9] and was translated into English by the Anglican missionary and orientalist Percy Badger in 1852.[10] In the following century, Yūsuf Ḥabbī produced an edition and annotated Arabic translation.[11] Syriacists continue to mine the *Catalogue* for valuable literary-historical data,[12] and the number of manuscripts that preserve it attests to its popularity within the Assyro-Chaldean Churches.[13]

In addition to his cataloguing activities, ʿAbdīshōʿ is well-remembered as a compiler of canon law. Most notable of his compilation is the *Kunnāšā psīqāyā d-qānōnē sunhāḏīqāyē* ('Concise Collection of Synodal Canons'), often referred to as the *Nomocanon*. As suggested by its title, the *Nomocanon* is a systematic compilation of canons instituted by the historic synods of the Church of the East, namely those held between 410 and the reign of the catholicos Timothy I

[4] William Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London: A. and C. Black, 1894), 288–299; Sebastian P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1997) 81; Jeff W. Childers, "Abdishoʿ bar Brikha', *GEDSH*, 3–4.

[5] On this edition, see Hubert Kaufhold, 'Abraham Ecchellensis et le *Catalogue des livres* de ʿAḇdīšōʿ bar Brīḵā', in *Orientalisme, science et controverse: Abraham Ecchellensis (1605–1664)*, ed. Bernard Heyberger (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 119–33.

[6] Childers, "Abdishoʿ bar Brikha', 3.

[7] Wright, *A Short History*, 288.

[8] Peter Kawerau, *Das Christentum des Ostens* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1972), 83: 'Eine literarhistorische Quelle ersten Range'.

[9] Joseph S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-vaticana*, 3 vols. (Rome: Typis Sacræ Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719–28), 3/1:3–362.

[10] Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842 to 1844*, 2 vols. (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), 2: 362–379.

[11] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Catologus Auctorum Abdišo'* [sic!]/*Fihris al-mu'allifīn ta'lif li-ʿAbd Yashūʿ al-Ṣūbāwī*, ed. and tr. Yūsuf Ḥabbī (Baghdad: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1986); cited hereafter as *Catalogue*.

[12] Childers, "Abdishoʿ bar Brikha', 3.

[13] See *GSL*, 325.

(d. 824).[14] The canons are organized into two books: the first on civil law (inheritance, marriage, custody, loans, etc.), the second on the ecclesiastical hierarchy (priestly ordination, monastic discipline, consecration of bishops, etc.).[15] The *Nomocanon* is by no means the first systematic collection of East Syrian canon law, drawing heavily as it does from earlier legal compendia.[16] Despite being a relatively late development in East Syrian canon law, it would have by far the most impact after being officially declared authoritative at the synod of Timothy II, in 1318.[17] Since then, it has been read and copied frequently, remaining an essential source of canon law for the Church of the East.[18] It was first printed by Angelo Mai in 1838 with a Latin translation, and a later edition was produced by Joseph De Kelaita in 1918.[19] The earliest surviving manuscript of the *Nomocanon* was copied during ʿAbdīshōʿ's own lifetime, in 1291, and is available in facsimile.[20] The manuscript is Thrissur 64, which was brought to southern India from the Middle East and is currently one of eighty-two manuscripts that form the collection of the Metropolitan of the Church of the East (or the Chaldean Syrian Church, as it is known in India). In fact, it is one of the few pre-Catholic East Syrian texts in India to have escaped destruction at the hands of the Portuguese Inquisition. So emblematic of the Nestorian tradition was ʿAbdīshōʿ's name that an unknown scribe later excised it from the title page in order to evade notice.[21]

In terms of popularity, however, neither the *Catalogue* nor the *Nomocanon* surpass ʿAbdīshōʿ's poetic magnum opus known as *Pardaysā da-ʿḏen* ('The Paradise of Eden'). Helen Younansardaroud has counted no less than seventy-one extant manuscripts of both East and West Syrian provenance, attesting to the

[14] On the sources of the *Nomocanon*, see Hubert Kaufhold, introduction, xv–xlvi, here xxv–xxvii and idem, 'Sources of Canon Law in the East Churches', in *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, ed. Wilfred Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2012), 215–342, here 311.

[15] For the basic structure of the *Nomocanon*, see Kaufhold, introduction, xxviii–xxix and Aprem Mooken, 'Canon Law of Mar Abdisho', *The Harp* 4, no. 1–3 (1991): 85–102, here 92–102.

[16] Namely those by Gabriel of Baṣrā (fl. ninth century) and ʿAbdallah ibn al-Ṭayyib. For ʿAbdīshōʿ's dependence on them, see Kaufhold, introduction, xxv–xxvii and idem, 'Sources of Canon Law', 311.

[17] See Canon XIII of the synod in Joseph Simonius Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana, in qua manuscriptos codices Syriacos, Arabicos, Persicos, Turcicos, Hebraicos, Samaritanos, Armenicos, Æthiopicos, Graecos, Ægyptiacos, Ibericos & Malabaricos*. 3 vols. (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719–28), 3/1: 570.

[18] For this work's copious manuscripts, see *GSL*, 324. For its continuing significance, see Aprim Mooken, 'Codification of the Canon Law by Mar Abdisho in 1290 A.D.', in *VI. Symposium Syriacum 1992, University of Cambridge 30 August–2 September 1992*', ed. René Lavenant (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994), 371–380.

[19] Angelo Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e Vaticanis codicibus edita*, 10 vols. (Rome: Typis Collegii Urbani, 1825–38), 10:169–331; ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Kunnāšā psīqāyā d-qānōnē sunhāḏīqāyē/ The Nomocanon or the Collection of the Synodical Canons*, ed. Joseph Da Kelaita (Urmia: n.p. 1918).

[20] See above, note 2. I refer to this edition throughout.

[21] *Nomocanon*, 1.

works popularity across denominational lines.[22] The *Paradise of Eden* saw partial editions and translations throughout the nineteenth century,[23] but no complete text was produced until Joseph De Kelaita's 1916 edition (reprinted in 1928 and again in 1989).[24] The work itself consists of fifty poetic discourses on theological subjects, fourteen of which were translated into English in an unpublished doctoral thesis by Frederick Winnet in 1929.[25] In his proem to the work, ʿAbdīshōʿ tells us that he composed these verses to answer the boasts of unnamed Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*) that their language was unrivalled in elegance and sophistication.[26] He also informs us that he wrote the *Paradise of Eden* in 1290/1, and that some years later, in 1315/16, he added a gloss due to the work's many lexical rarities.[27] Yet despite its enduring popularity among Syriac Christians throughout the centuries, the *Paradise of Eden* has been judged by some modern scholars as far too imitative of Arabic belles-lettres and too embellished in its style to merit serious study.[28] Moreover, what little has been written about this work has focused more on matters of style and genre than the content of its verses.

1.2 ʿAbdīshōʿ's Written Legacy: A Panoramic View

At the end of his *Catalogue*, ʿAbdīshōʿ ennumerates his own works, which we will now list to get a sense of the depth and range of his legacy. Since he does not appear to organize these chronologically and omits others known to have been authored by him, it is necessary to build a more comprehensive list, together with a brief description and date of composition (where possible) of each. In order to get a better sense of his Arabic-Syriac bilingualism, each work's language will be indicated. Although a similarly comprehensive list has been assembled by Hubert Kaufhold,[29] what follows in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 below is an updated survey with further annotations and new discoveries. Works appearing in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue* are indicated with an asterisk.[30]

[22] Helen Younansardaroud, 'A list of the known Manuscripts of the Syriac *Maqāmat* of ʿAbdīšōʿ bar Brīkā († 1318): "Paradise of Eden"', *Journal of Academic Assyrian Studies* 20, no. 1 (2006): 28–41.

[23] For these, see Helen Younansardaroud, 'Aḇdīšōʿ Bar Brīḵā's († 1318) Book of Paradise: A Literary Renaissance?', in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule and Carmen Fotescu Tauwinkl (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 195–205, here 199–201.

[24] The edition that I refer to throughout this book is ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Pardaysā da-ʿḏen*, ed. Joseph De Kelaita, 2nd ed. (Mosul: Maṭbaʿṯā d-ʾĀṯorāytā d-ʿEdtā ʿAttīqtā d-Maḏnḥā, 1928), hereafter *Paradise*.

[25] Frederick Winnet, 'Paradise of Eden' (PhD diss., University of Toronto Press, 1929).

[26] *Paradise*, 2. ʿAbdīshōʿ's justification for writing the *Paradise of Eden* will be discussed in more detail below.

[27] *Paradise*, 3.

[28] See below, Section 1.5.

[29] Kaufhold, introduction.

[30] For these, see Kaufhold, introduction, xvii–xx.

Table 1.1 Datable and approximately datable works

	Title	Lang.	Desc.	Date
1.*	*Nomocanon* (see above, Section 1.1)	Syr.	Collection of eccl. law	Before 1279/80[31]
2.*	*Tafṣīr risālat Arisṭū fi al-ṣinā'a*[32]	Ar.	Purported trans. of a pseudo-Aristotelian epistle on alchemy.	Before 1285/6[33]
3.*	*The Paradise of Eden* (see above, Section 1.1)	Syr.	Theological poetry	1290/1; gloss added in 1215/16
4.*	*The Book of the Pearl* (see below, Section 1.3.1)	Syr.	Systematic theology/ Christian apology	1297/8
5.	*Catalogue* (see above, Section 1.1)	Syr.	List of eccl. writers and their works	1298 according to Percy Badger;[34] updated after 1315/6
6.	*Haymānūṯā d-nesṭōryānē* (see below, Section 1.3.2)	Ar.	Brief *confessio fide* in Arabic (despite Syriac title in mss.)	1300
7.	*al-Anājīl al-musajja'a*[35]	Ar.	Rhymed Arabic trans. of Syriac lectionary	1299/1300[36]
8.*	*al-Durra al-muthammana fī uṣūl al-dīn* (see below, Section 1.3.3)	Ar.	Systematic theology/ Christian apology	1303/4
9.	*Farā'id al-fawā'id fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-al-'aqā'id*, (see below, Section 1.3.4)	Ar.	Systematic theology/ Christian apology	1313
10.*	*Ṭukkās dīnē w-nāmōsē 'edtānāyē*[37]	Syr.	Collection of church-legal rulings	1315/6[38]

[31] On this approximate dating, see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.

[32] Listed in the *Catalogue* as *Puššāq 'eggarteh d-rabbā 'Āreṣṭōṭālīs tmīhā hāy d-'aḵteḇ l-'Āleksandrōs 'al 'ummānūṯā raḇṭā* ('Translation of the Epistle of the Great and Admirable Aristotle that he Wrote to Alexander on the Noble Art [i.e., Alchemy]'); *Catalogue*, 132 (text), 236 (trans.). For manuscripts of this unedited work, see Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1967–1971), 4:102. As to my translation of *puššāqā* as 'translation' rather than 'commentary', see Salam Rassi, 'Alchemy in an Age of Disclosure: The Case of an Arabic Pseudo-Aristotelian Treatise and its Syriac Christian "Translator",' *Asiatische Studien* 75, no. 3 (2021): 545–609, here 559–560. See also discussion in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 of this study for the contents and character of this work.

[33] On this approximate dating, see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.

[34] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, 2:361. According to William Wright (*A Short History*, 289), Badger derives his date from the manuscript on which he based his translation of the *Catalogue*.

[35] Edition: 'Abdīshō' bar Brīkhā, *Anājīl 'Abdīshū' al-Ṣūbāwī († 1318) al-Musajja'a*, ed. Sami Khoury, 2 vols. (Beirut: CEDRAC, 2007).

[36] See Samir Khalil Samir, 'Date de composition de l'évangéliaire rimé de 'Abdīšū'', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 47 (1972): 175–181.

[37] Edition: 'Abdīshō' Bar Brīkhā, *Ebedjesus von Nisibis „Ordo Iudiciorum Ecclesiasticorum"Eine Zusammenstellung Der Kirchlichen Rechtsbestimmungen Der Ostsyrischen Kirche Im 14. Jahrhundert*, ed. And tr. Hubert Kaufhold (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019); henceforth *Ṭukkāsā*.

[38] For the dating of this work, see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.

Table 1.2 Undated works

	Title	Lang.	Desc.
11.	*Khuṭba tataḍammanu ḥaqīqat ʾtiqādinā fi al-tathlīth wa-l-ḥulūl* (see Section 1.3.4)	Ar.	Rhymed sermon on the Trinity and Incarnation.
12.	*ʿŌniṭā d-Mār Šemʿōn d-Šanqlāband d-pašqāh Mār(y) ʿAḇdīšōʿ mītrāpōlīṭā d-Ṣōḇā wa-ḏ-ʾArmānīyā*[39]	Syr.	Commentary on an enigmatic poem by Simon Shanqlāband (fl. early thirteenth), in response to a request from a priest named Abraham.
13.	*Ḥušbānā da-ḵrōnīqōn*[40]	Syr.	Metrical treatise on the computation of feastdays, addressed to one Amīn al-Dawla, possibly the catholicos Yahbalāhā III.
14.	*Mēmrā* in praise of the catholicos Yahḇalāhā III (untitled)[41]	Syr.	Written at the end of a Gospel lectionary copied by ʿAbdīshōʿ himself.

1.3 ʿAbdīshōʿ's Apologetic Works

Having enumerated ʿAbdīshōʿ's extant writings, we now turn to his works of apologetic theology. A more detailed and theoretical reflection on the term 'apologetic' will be given below (Section 1.6). For now, by 'apologetic' I mean those works written with the intention of answering non-Christian—mainly Muslim—critiques of Christian doctrine, whether implicitly or explicitly. What follows is an introduction to each of these works that form the basis of the present study, with a brief discussion of their authorship, contents, transmission, and literary afterlife.

[39] Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana sir. 187, 1v–15r, on which see Stephen Evodius Assemani and Simon Joseph Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticane Codicum Manuscritorum Catalogus*, 3 vols. (Rome: Typographia Linguarum Orientalium, 1759), 3:404–405. For the poem that is the subject of ʿAbdīshōʿ's commentary, see Lucas Van Rompay, 'Shemʿon Shanqlawi', *GEDSH*, 374. It is possible that the commentary is among those listed in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue* as *Šrāy šuʾālē ʿasqē* ('Answer[s] to difficult questions'); *Catalogue*, 133 (text), 236 (trans.).

[40] Edition: ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Ḥušbānā da-ḵrōnīqōn* in Joseph De Kelaita, *Kṯāḇā d-meṯqrē Margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵresṭyānūṯā da-ʿḇīḏ l-Mār(y) ʿAḇdīšōʿ mīṭrāpoliṭā d-Ṣōḇā wa-ḏ-ʾArmānīyā, ʿam kunnāšā d-mēmrē mawtrānē*, 2nd edition (Mosul: Maṭbaʿṯā ʾĀṭorāytā d-ʿEdtā ʿAttīqtā d-Maḏnḥā, 1924), 84–92.

[41] Edition and translation: Jacques-Marie Vosté (ed. and tr.), 'Memra en l'honneur de Iahballaha III', *Le Muséon* 42 (1929): 168–176.

1.3.1 *Margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵresṯyānūṯā* ('The Pearl Concerning the Truth of Christianity')

Written in 1297/8 in the city of Khlāṭ (located on the south-western banks of Lake Van),[42] the *Book of the Pearl* (hereafter, *Pearl*) is by far the best known of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theological writings. It is a brief work of dogma consisting of five chapters: (i) God; (ii) Creation; (iii) the Christian dispensation (*mḏabrānūṯā d-ḇa-mšīḥā*, i.e., the coming of Christ and the Incarnation); (iv) the sacraments; and (v) things that signal the world to come (*hālēn d-ʿal ʿālmā da-ʿtīḏ mḇadqān*, i.e., devotional practices).[43] It was frequently read and copied in the many centuries after its composition,[44] and was first printed in 1837 with a Latin translation overseen by Angelo Mai.[45] Its usefulness as an epitome of Nestorian dogma was recognized by Percy Badger, who in 1852 appended an English translation of it to his summary of the beliefs and practices of the Church of the East.[46] In 1868, various chapters of the *Pearl* were also included in a printed chrestomathy of East Syrian works entitled *Ḵṯāḇōnā d-partūṯē* ('The Little Book of Crumbs').[47] It was re-edited by Joseph De Kelaita in 1908 and reprinted in 1924 (from which I cite here) as part of an anthology of foundational works by East Syrian writers.[48] It continues to be read among present-day members of the Church of the East, and in 1916 a Neo-Aramaic translation of the *Pearl* was made in New York.[49] The *Pearl* would later provide the model for a more up-to-date catechism in the 1960s.[50] A further English translation was produced by the Church of the East patriarch, Eshai Shimun, in 1965.[51]

[42] According to notes in two manuscripts on which see Eduard Sachau, *Verzeichniss der syrischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, 2 vols. (Berlin: A. Asher, 1899), 1:312; William Wright and Stanley A. Cook, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 2:1216.

[43] For a summary of the *Pearl*'s contents, see Kawerau, *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 83–97.

[44] See *GSL*, 324, n.2.

[45] Mai, *Scriptorum*, 10:342–366.

[46] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 2:380–422.

[47] *Ḵṯāḇōnā d-partūṯē, hānaw dēn mnāwāṯā mḵanšāṯā men ḵṯāḇē d-ʾaḇāhāṯā maḵṯḇānē w-malpānē suryāyē* (Urmia: Press of the Archbishop of Canterbury Mission, 1898), 34–38.

[48] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Ḵṯāḇā d-margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵresṯyānūṯā*. In Joseph De Kelaita. *Ktāḇā d-meṯqre margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵresṯyānūṯā da-ʿḇīḏ l-Mār(y) ʿAḇdīšōʿ mīṯrāpōlīṭā d-Ṣōḇā wa-ḏ-ʾArmānīyā, ʿam kunnāšā d-mēmrē mawtrānē*, 2nd edition (Mosul: Maṭbaʿṯā ʾĀṯorāytā d-ʿEdtā ʿAttīqtā d-Maḏnḥā, 1924), 2–99; cited hereafter as *Pearl*.

[49] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Ḵṯāḇā d-margānīṯā d-Mār(y) ʿAḇdīšōʿ bar Brīḵā*, tr. Yoḥannān Ābrāhām (New York: Samuel A. Jacobs, 1916).

[50] *Ḵṯāḇā d-sīmāṯā d-haymānūṯā d-ʿedtā qaddīštā wa-šlīḥāytā qāṯōliqī d-maḏnḥā* (Tehran: Scholarly Society of Assyrian Youth, 1964).

[51] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *The Book Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity, Written by Mar O'dishoo Metropolitan of Suwa (Nisibin) and Armenia*, tr. Eshai Shimun (Kerala: Mar Themotheus Memorial, 1965).

A reliable and popular *summa* was the very thing ʿAbdīshōʿ intended his *Pearl* to be, as we learn from his preamble:

> Having graciously approved of the book *The Paradise of Eden*, which I composed in verse of all kinds, the father of our nation and leader of our dogma [the catholicos-patriarch Mār Yahbalāhā III] commanded me to write another book that would establish the truth of Christianity and the rectitude of its doctrine, that it might be for the study and instruction of students and a benefit to all lovers of Christ under his sway [...] As an obedient servant, I complied with his profitable command and in pithy fashion and with simple words (*ba-zʿōryāṯā wa-ḇ-mellē pšīṭāṯā*) wrote this book, small in size but large in power and significance, which for this reason I called the *Book of the Pearl on the Truth of Christianity*, in which I have concisely (*ba-znā psīqāyā*) treated all the roots and foundations of ecclesiastical doctrine and its subdivisions and offshoots.[52]

The first attempt to discuss the *Pearl*'s theology in any detail was by Peter Kawerau, who noted its systematic treatment of East Syrian doctrine and use of earlier sources, describing it as a 'culmination of Antiochian theology'.[53] Yet despite its many modern editions, translations, and enduring popularity within the Church of the East, the *Pearl* has received precious little attention from modern scholars. Furthermore, the *Pearl*'s apologetic dimension, which may be inferred from its title ('On the Truth of Christianity'), has only recently been highlighted by Herman Teule, who brings to light various themes that indirectly address Muslim objections, for instance, the credibility of Gospels and the non-corporeal bliss of the Christian afterlife.[54] As I demonstrate throughout this book, the *Pearl* is typical of Christian *summae* written under Muslim rule that were intended to educate the faithful about the foundational aspects of their faith, while equipping them with the means to counter hypothetical and actual criticism from Muslim and Jewish quarters. Yet the *Pearl* also contains polemical themes, since much of its Christology is directed against Jacobite and Melkite Christians,[55] thereby revealing the interdependence of apologetics and polemics more generally.

[52] *Pearl*, 2.

[53] Kawerau, *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 83: 'der Abschluß der antiochenischen Theologie'.

[54] Herman G.B. Teule, 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, *CMR* 4 (2012): 750–761, here 753–755.

[55] Although initially pejorative in East Syrian circles, 'Jacobite' and 'Melkite' became standard terms of reference after the seventh-century Muslim conquests. On their evolution under Muslim rule, see Sidney H. Griffith, 'Melkites and Jacobites and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in third/Ninth-Century Syria', in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–57.

1.3.2 *Haymānūṯā d-nesṭōryānē* ('The Profession of Faith of the Nestorians'), or *Amāna* ('Profession of Faith')

A far lesser-known work by ʿAbdīshōʿ, the *Haymānūṯā d-nesṭōryānē* (or *Amāna*, henceforth *Profession*) comprises a brief statement of Trinitarian and Christological doctrine, in an unadorned Arabic prose. The date of composition is indicated at the end of the text, given in Hijrī as 1 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 698 (= 7 December 1298 CE).[56] Although the work is in Arabic, it is often included in manuscript anthologies of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Syriac works, and perhaps for this reason often bears the Syriac title *Haymānūṯā d-nesṭōryānē*.[57] Interestingly, one nineteenth-century manuscript contains the whole text in Syriac, though it is unclear whether this version was translated by the scribe or copied from an earlier translation.[58] The text was first published in an article by Samir Khalil[59] and later appeared in an anthology of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theological works edited by Gianmaria Gianazza,[60] the latter of which I cite for the purposes of this study.

The *Profession* opens with an affirmation of God's oneness and the substantial unity of His attributes (*ṣifāt*). The rest of the work discusses the three main Christological positions, Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian, followed by a deconstruction of the first two and a vindication of the latter. That the *Profession* is limited to the Trinity and Incarnation is far from incidental, since both were major points of contention in Christian–Muslim conversations about God's unity and transcendence (as will be discussed in further detail below). As I discuss in Chapter 4, the intra-Christian polemic embedded in this work is best understood in the broader context of Christian–Muslim apologetics, whereby various Christian confessions competed to convince Muslims that their doctrines were more acceptable than others. The *Profession*, therefore, represents yet another intersection between apologetics and polemics, demonstrating how the one was often contingent on the other.

The apologetic context of the *Profession* was first hinted at by Samir Khalil Samir in his edition of the text in 1993, suggesting that ʿAbdīshōʿ's exposition of rival Christological positions was influenced by Elias bar Shennāyā's *Kitāb al-Majālis* ('Book of Sessions'), an account of a disputation between Bar Shennāyā

[56] On this dating, see Samir, 'Une profession de foi', 448.

[57] See, for example, Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library: A Catalogue* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 59, Wright and Cook, *Catalogue*, 2:1215.

[58] See Jean-Baptiste Chabot, 'Les manuscrits syriaques de la Bibliothèque nationale acquis depuis 1874', *Journal Asiatique* 9, no. 8 (1896): 234–290, here 263.

[59] Samir Khalil Samir, 'Une Profession de Foi de ʿAbdišūʿ de Nisibe', in *Enlogēma: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft S.J.*, ed. Ephrem Carr and Frederick W. Norris (Rome: Pontificia Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1993), 445–448.

[60] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Amāna*, in Gianmaria Gianazza, *Testi teologici di Ebedjesu* (Bologna: Grupo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiano, 2018), 251–262; henceforth cited as *Profession*.

and the Muslim vizier Abu al-Qāsim al-Maghribī in 1027.[61] More recently, Alexander Treiger has drawn parallels between the *Profession*'s Christology and that of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*, to which the famous Ḥanbalite jurist and polemicist Ibn Taymiyya vigorously responded.[62] While Treiger does not suggest a direct relationship between the two texts, his study correctly highlights the interreligious resonances present in the *Profession*.

1.3.3 *al-Durra al-muthammana al-rūḥāniyya fī uṣūl al-dīn al-naṣrāniyya* ('The Precious and Spiritual Pearl Concerning the Foundations of Christianity'), or *al-Durra al-muthammana* ('The Precious Pearl')

This text, henceforth *Durra*, is a systematic work of theology, though this time written mainly in rhymed Arabic prose (*sajʿ*). It is tempting to see the *Durra* (= Syr. *Margānīṭā*) as an Arabic version of the Syriac *Pearl*. However, while the two works share a general structure and aim, they differ considerably in their size, range of subjects, and compositional layers. Compared with the Syriac *Pearl*, the *Durra* is far more expansive in its coverage of doctrine, comprising no less than eighteen chapters. These are divided into 'theoretical principles' (*uṣūl ʿilmiyya*) and 'practical principles' (*uṣūl ʿamaliyya*), the former treating matters such as the veracity of the Scriptures, the Trinity, and the Incarnation, the latter addressing matters of cult.[63]

The work first came to the attention of modern academe after a manuscript copied in 1703 was presented in an article in *al-Mashriq* by Yusuf Ghanīma, who had discovered it in the library of the Cathedral of the Chaldean Church in Baghdad, in 1904.[64] Once believed to be lost, Ghanīma's manuscript now resides in Mosul, and has been digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library.[65] A further witness, dated 1360, was later indicated by Paul Sbath in a catalogue of privately held manuscripts in Aleppo, though this appears to no longer be extant

[61] Samir, 'Une profession de foi', 434.

[62] Alexander Treiger, 'The Christology of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65, no. 1–2 (2013): 21–48, here 39–41.

[63] For an overview of contents, see Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: attitudes nestoriennes* vis-à-vis *de l'Islam* (Paris: Cariscript, 1994), 137. See also my discussion about the significance of this work's structure, in Section 1.8 below.

[64] Yūsuf Ghanīma, 'Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn li-ʿAbdīshūʿ muṭrān naṣībīn', *al-Mashriq* 7 (1904): 908–1003. This work does not occur in the catalogue of manuscripts housed in the Chaldean Monastery in Baghdad. For these, see Buṭrus Ḥaddād and Jāk Isḥāq, *al-Makhṭūṭāt al-suryāniyya wa-l-ʿarabīyya fī khizānat al-rahbāniyya al-kaldāniyya fī Baghdād* (Baghdād: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1988).

[65] Mosul, Dominican Friars of Mosul, 202 (digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, project number: DFM 202). The colophon of this manuscript (on 164v) is identical to that recorded by Ghanīma, 'Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn', 1000.

(if indeed it ever existed).[66] In 2018, Gianmaria Gianazza produced an edition and Italian translation from a single manuscript witness from the Bibliothèque Orientale at the University of St Joseph, Beirut.[67] Unfortunately, the manuscript on which Gianazza bases his edition is incomplete at the beginning and contains several lacunae in its final chapter. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity and ease of access to the modern reader, I will use Gianazza's edition while consulting the Mosul manuscript where necessary.

A further complication surrounding this work is its name. The first study of the *Durra*'s contents was by Bénédicte Landron, who, working solely from the Beirut manuscript later used by Gianazza, refers to it as the *Uṣūl al-dīn*.[68] However, proof that one ought to refer to this work as *al-Durra al-muthammana* (with *fī uṣūl al-dīn* as its subtitle) comes from ʿAbdīshōʿ's own pen. Among his own writings listed at the end of his *Catalogue*, ʿAbdīshōʿ indicates a work entitled *Kṯāḇā d-šāhmarwārīd*, which he says he wrote in Arabic (*d-ʾarāḇāʾīṯ rakkeḇteh*).[69] The Persian loanword *šāhmarwārīd*, lit. 'royal pearl', is a rarity in the Syriac language.[70] However, one can easily infer from it the meaning 'precious pearl', i.e., *al-Durra al-muthammana*.[71] We find further support for this interpretation in a valuable note from an East Syrian manuscript held in the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Saint Mark, Jerusalem.[72] The author of this note, possibly the second patriarch of the Chaldean Church, ʿAbdīshōʿ of Gāzartā (r. 1555–1570),[73] records a number of books by ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā that he had seen. Among them is 'his autograph of the book of *šāhmarwārīd*, that is, *margānīṯā*, in rhymed Arabic (*ṭayyāʾīṯ ba-mšūḥṭā*), [also] called *Uṣūl al-dīn*'. The note further states that ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote this work in 1614 A.G. (=1302/3 CE). From these testimonies, it would seem that the work was known properly as the *Precious* (or *Royal*) *Pearl*, and that *Uṣūl al-dīn* formed the latter part of its title. Finally, the title of the work is

[66] Paul Sbath, *Al-Fihris: Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Imprimerie Al-Chark, 1938), 1:53.

[67] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *I fondamenti della religione (*Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn*)*, ed. and tr. Gianmaria Gianazza (Bologna: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018); henceforth cited as *Durra*. For a description of Gianazza's unicum, see Ignace Abdo-Khalifé and François Baissari, 'Catalogue raisonné des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque orientale de l'Université Saint Joseph (seconde série)', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 29, no. 4 (1951–1952): 103–155, here 104–105. This manuscript has been digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (project number: USJ 936).

[68] Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak*, 137.

[69] Bar Brīkhā, *Catalogue*, 131 (text), 236 (trans.).

[70] See Claudia A. Ciancaglini, *Iranian Loanwords in Syriac* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008), 260.

[71] This is particularly the case when we remember that the *Catalogue*'s metrical structure would have required a certain economy of words. The first strophe of this entry reads *wa-ḵṯāḇā d-šāhmarwārīd*—thereby conforming to the *Catalogue*'s heptasyllabic scheme.

[72] Jerusalem, Saint Mark's Monastery, 159, 106r. This manuscript has been digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (project number: SMMJ 159). See also Yuhanna Dolabani, *Catalogue of the Syriac manuscripts in St. Mark's monastery* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), 343–344. For an English translation of this note, see Kaufhold, introduction, xxi–xxii.

[73] See Anton Pritula, "Abdīšōʿ of Gāzartā, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church as a Scribe', *Scrinium* 15, no. 1 (2019): 297–320, here 299.

mentioned in the text itself; in a section of his preface missing from Gianazza's edition, ʿAbdīshōʿ tells us that he gave his book the title 'The Precious Pearl' (*laqqabtuhu bi-l-Durra al-muthammana*).[74]

That the *Durra* has come down to us at all is remarkable. As Heleen Murre-van den Berg has pointed out, the transmission of Arabic manuscripts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was rather limited among the neo-Aramaic-speaking members of the Church of the East living in the mountainous regions of upper Mesopotamia.[75] Arabic-speaking East Syrian Christians living in urban centres, on the other hand, were far likelier to be attracted to Catholicism. Indeed, the Arabic language in early modern times was often employed as a vehicle for Catholic proselytization, 'making it possible for Latin Christian traditions to find their way into the Chaldean Church'.[76] Nevertheless, the most complete witnesses to the *Durra*—our Mosul manuscript—was copied in 1703, in the time of 'the patriarch Eliya', likely Eliya X Mārawgen (r. 1700–1722),[77] a 'traditionalist' patriarch known for his resistance to Catholicism.[78] This suggests that Arabic works of Nestorian doctrine continued to find relevance among members of the Church of the East well into the modern period.

As to the apologetic tenor of the *Durra*, ʿAbdīshōʿ makes clear in his preface that he intended his work both as a concise summation of doctrine and a defence of the faith:

> Some distinguished and believing nobles have insistently urged me to compose, in summary form (*mukhtaṣaran wajīz al-ikhtiṣār*), a subtle book concerning the foundations of the religion, comprising the doctrines of the rightly guided leaders and blessed Fathers, containing the cream of truths and mysteries (*zubdat al-ḥaqāʾiq wa-l-asrār*), to be a proof against the antagonism of adversaries and a path to lifting the veil of doubt from the meaning [of Christianity].[79]

As with the *Pearl*, the *Durra* has received precious little attention. In her masterful survey of medieval Nestorian writings about Islam, Bénédicte Landron mentioned aspects of the *Durra*'s treatment of the Trinity, Christology, and devotional worship.[80] However, her study, though extremely useful, constitutes more of an

[74] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *al-Durra al-Muthammana al-rūḥāniyya fī uṣūl al-dīn al-naṣrāniyya*, Mosul, Dominican Friars of Mosul 202, 6r.

[75] Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500–1850)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 76.

[76] Heleen Murre-van den Berg, 'Classical Syriac, Neo-Aramaic, and Arabic in the Church of the East and the Chaldean Church between 1500 and 1800', in *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting*, ed. Holger Gzella and Margaretha L. Folmer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 334–351, here 340–341.

[77] Bar Brīkhā, *al-Durra*, 164v–165r.

[78] On Eliya X, see Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures*, 64, 303. The Chaldean patriarch in 1703 was Yawsep II Ṣlībā Bēt Maʿrūf.

[79] *Durra*, Ch. 0, §§ 17–18.

[80] Landron, *Attitudes*, ch. 7, 8, and 15.

overview than an in-depth textual analysis. More recently, Herman Teule has indicated some of the work's themes concerning the abrogation of Mosaic Law, the veneration of the Cross, the direction of prayer to the east—all of which were sources of contention among Muslim critics of Christianity.[81]

Of further note is the *Durra*'s function as a *summa theologica*. In the above-cited passage ʿAbdīshōʿ uses a number of terms to express the act of summation, namely *mukhtaṣar, ikhtiṣār*, and *zubda*. The latter, which literally means 'cream', often occurs in pre-modern Arabic summations of learned topics. The famous Muslim philosopher Avicenna (d. 1037), for example, concludes his *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* ('Pointers and Admonitions') with the famous statement: 'O brother! In these remarks, I have brought forth to you the cream of the truth (*zubdat al-ḥaqq*) and, bit by bit, I have fed you the choicest pieces of wisdom, in subtle words.'[82] Similarly, the philosopher Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 1262 or 1265) wrote a *summa* entitled *Zubdat al-ḥaqāʾiq* ('Cream of Realities') and another entitled *Zubdat al-asrār* ('Cream of Mysteries').[83] Further on in this chapter, I will situate ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra* and similar works within connected genres of *summa*-writing in the medieval Islamicate World.

1.3.4 *Farāʾid al-fawāʾid fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-l-ʿaqāʾid* ('Gems of Utility Concerning the Foundations of Religion and Beliefs')

This work (hereafter *Farāʾid*) comprises yet another epitome of ecclesiastical doctrine in Arabic, this time numbering only thirteen sections (*fuṣūl*). The work's schematization roughly follows that of the *Durra*, addressing core matters of dogma such as the veracity of the Gospels, the Trinity, and the Incarnation, followed by issues of orthopraxy such as the veneration of the Cross and the sacraments. However, ʿAbdīshōʿ treats these topics with far greater brevity and concision, suggesting perhaps that he intended the *Farāʾid* as an abridgment of the *Durra*. Several chapters of the *Farāʾid* were extracted by Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā and incorporated into the fifth book of his *Asfār al-asrār*.[84] Here, Ṣalībā informs us that ʿAbdīshōʿ completed this work in the year 1313.[85] Željko Paša was the first to edit the

[81] Herman G.B. Teule, "Abdishoʿ of Nisibis', *CMR* 4 (2012): 750–761, here 759–760.

[82] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-al-tanbīhāt li-Abī ʿAlī ibn Sīnā maʿa sharḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1947–1948), 4:121.

[83] On this work, see Heidrun Eichner, 'The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy: Philosophical and Theological *summae* in Context' (Habilitationschrift, Martin-Luther-Universität, 2009), 109–114.

[84] Al-Mawṣilī, *I libri dei misteri*, 579–597. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Arabic of the fifth book of this work remains unedited.

[85] Al-Mawṣilī, *I libri dei misteri*, 579.

Farāʾid as part of an unpublished doctoral thesis defended in 2013.[86] A further edition was produced by Gianmaria Gianazza in 2018, which I use here.[87]

That the *Farāʾid* was written with the intention of defending Christianity against criticism is made clear by ʿAbdīshōʿ in his preface, though this time he explicitly mentions Muslims and Muslim authorities:

> I found that the master and guide Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (may God have mercy on his soul) says: 'Finding fault with doctrines before comprehending them is absurd, nay, it leads to blindness and error.' A person possessed of impartiality and intelligence only censures and approves [an argument] after investigation and study, and a fair-minded judge only passes sentence on one of two litigants after hearing [both] claims that have been brought forward, and by studying the substance of the evidence of what has been alleged. Because a group of 'those who believe' (*alladhīna āmanū*) and 'those who are Jews' (*alladhīna hādū*)[88] have maligned the Christians and have ascribed to them polytheism and unbelief for the things they believe—which on the surface might appear objectionable, but upon rigorous investigation are truthful and irreproachable—it is incumbent upon us to clarify in this book the number of things pertaining to the Christian doctrine that they vilify, and to establish proof for their necessity and soundness.[89]

The opening quotation comes from the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* ('Doctrines of the Philosophers') and the *Tafāhut al-falāsifa* ('Incoherence of the Philosophers') of the famous Ashʿarite theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111).[90] Meanwhile, the reference to 'those who believe (i.e., Muslims) and those who are Jews' alludes to Q 2:62.[91] The openness with which ʿAbdīshōʿ mentions non-Christian criticisms and authorities would suggest, at first blush, that the *Farāʾid* is addressed to Muslims and Jews. However, as will become clear further on, the *Farāʾid*'s main

[86] Željko Paša, 'Kitāb farāʾid al-fawāʾid fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-l-ʿaqāʾid: Book of the Pearls of Utility: On the Principles of the Religion and Dogmas', (PhD diss., Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2013).

[87] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *al-Farāʾid al-fawāʾid fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-l-ʿaqāʾid*, in Gianmaria Gianazza, *Testi teologico di Ebedjesu* (Bologna: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018), 39–227; henceforth cited as *Farāʾid*.

[88] See below in this section for this Qurʾānic allusion to Muslims and Jews.

[89] *Farāʾid*, ch. 0. §§ 16–23.

[90] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961), 31: *al-Wuqūfʿalā fasād al-madhāhib qabla al-iḥāṭ bi-l-madārikihā muḥāl bal huwa ramy fī al-ʿimāya wa-l-ḍalāl*; idem, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers/Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. and tr. Michael E. Marmura, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 89: *Fa-inna al-ʿtirāḍ ʿalā al-madhhab qabla tamām al-tafhīm ramyfī ʿimāya*.

[91] 'Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs good deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them and neither shall they grieve.' This verse was often understood by Qurʾānic exegetes in the context of *naskh* ('abrogation'), the idea that the Qurʾān's revelation superseded that of the other monotheistic faiths; see Louay Fatoohi, *Abrogation in the Qurʾan and Islamic Law: A Critical Study of the Concept of 'Naskh' and Its Impact* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 82.

addressees are in fact Christians. Like ʿAbdīshōʿ's other systematic theologies, the *Farāʾid* was written as a didactic summary of the faith that was simultaneously intended to reassure Christians that their beliefs could be reasonably upheld in a sometimes hostile setting.

1.3.5 *Khuṭba tataḍammanu ḥaqīqat ʾiʿtiqādinā fī al-tathlīth wa-l-ḥulūl* ('Sermon on the Truth of Our Belief in the Trinity and Indwelling')

Like the *Profession*, the *Khuṭba* comprises a brief discussion of the Trinity and Incarnation, though this time in the form of a sermon in rhymed Arabic, at the end of which ʿAbdīshōʿ exhorts his listeners to prepare for the afterlife. Also like the *Profession*, the *Khuṭba* does not make explicit reference to Muslims but is unmistakeably apologetic in nature. As I will later discuss, the Trinity and Incarnation were both major stumbling blocks to the Muslim understanding of Christian monotheism. The *Khuṭba* seeks to affirm the reasonableness of each of these concepts, thus highlighting the centrality of Christian–Muslim apologetics in briefer, extortionary texts intended for public recitation.

The sole witness to the text is from a manuscript copied by Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā (Paris, Bnf ar. 204), mentioned in the Introduction to the present study. Although the whole manuscript was completed by Ṣalībā in 1335 while in Cyprus, the section containing the *Khuṭba* was copied in 1626 A.G. (1315 CE), in the town of Jazīrat ibn ʿUmar (modern day Cizre in south-eastern Turkey), some three years before ʿAbdīshōʿ's death.[92] The text was published by Louis Cheikho in 1904[93] and again by Gianmaria Gianazza in 2018, each on the basis of Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā's manuscript[94] (I have used Gianazza's edition throughout). As will become clear in Chapters 3 and 4, the *Khuṭba*'s Trinitarian and Christological discourses closely follow those in the *Durra* and *Farāʾid*.

1.4 Christian–Muslim Relations beyond the 'Sectarian Milieu'

Turning our attention now to past trends in the study of Syriac and Christian Arabic apologetics, it is fair to say that most of the authors featured in Ṣalībā ibn

[92] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Khuṭba tataḍammanu ḥaqīqat ʾiʿtiqādinā fī al-tathlīth wa-l-ḥulūl*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, ar. 204, 44r–48v, here 48v.

[93] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Khuṭba tataḍammanu ḥaqīqat ʾiʿtiqādinā fī al-tathlīth wa-l-ḥulūl*, in *Seize traités*, 101–103.

[94] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Khuṭba fī al-tathlīth wa-l-tawḥīd*, in Gianmaria Gianazza, *Testi teologici di Ebedjesu* (Bologna: Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 2018), 233–247, hereafter *Khuṭba*.

Yūḥannā's theological compendia (introduced at the beginning of this study) have received scarce attention. Scholars have instead given far greater focus to Syriac- and Arabic-speaking Christian writers who lived under much earlier periods of Muslim rule. Where anti-Muslim apologetics are concerned, the names Theodore Abū Qurra (d. first half of ninth century), Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa al-Takrītī (d. ca. 830), and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d. after 838) loom large in recent scholarship.[95] Studies on these three figures are indebted in great part to numerous interventions by Sydney Griffith, who sees them as central to the emergence of a Christian theological idiom in the Arabic language.[96]

Similarly, polemical and apologetic responses to emergent Islam in Syriac as well as Arabic have also received considerable attention. In this context, one most often encounters the names of Nonnus of Nisibis (d. after 862), Timothy the Great (d. 823), and Theodore bar Kōnī (fl. end of eighth century).[97] Much of this attention has arguably arisen from attempts by historians to frame the emergence of Islam within the multi-religious environment of the late antique Middle East.[98] In this environment—dubbed the 'sectarian milieu' by John Wansbrough—a series of religious challenges from Christians and Jews to the early Muslim community contributed to the formation of the latter's self-identity, communal history, and what might be termed 'orthodoxy'.[99] Building on Wansbrough's idea of a 'pan-confessional polemic' imposed on the early Muslim community, Sydney Griffith has argued that

> the same may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of both the topics and the modes of expression in Arabic of Jewish and Christian theology, apology, and polemic in

[95] Studies abound; see Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2005), 28–112; Sara L. Husseini, *Early Christian–Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century CE)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century' (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2013); Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in Its Islamic Context* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

[96] Sydney H. Griffith, *Theodore Abu Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1992); idem, 'Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century', *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980): 161–201, reprinted in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic. Muslim Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2002), II; idem, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-burhān*: Christian *kalām* in the First Abbasid Century', *Le Muséon* 96 (1983): 145–181.

[97] For studies on their apologetic oeuvre, see Herman G.B. Teule, 'Nonnus of Nisibis', *CMR* 1 (2010): 243–245; Martin Heimgartner and Barbara Roggema, 'Timothy I', *CMR* 1 (2010): 515–531; Herman G.B. Teule, 'Theodore bar Koni', *CMS* 1 (2010): 343–346.

[98] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 189–203; Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), esp. 41–72 and 73–107.

[99] John E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2006), 40–44. See also Carl H. Becker, 'Christian Polemic and the Formation of Islamic Dogma', in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Robert Hoyland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 241–257.

> the early Islamic period. One may think of the situation of the three Arabic-speaking communities in the early Islamic period as one in which mutually reactive thinking was the intellectual order of the day.[100]

The debates that characterized Wansbrough's 'sectarian milieu' often took the form of public disputations (*munāẓārāt*) and 'literary salons' (*majālis*), which were held in the presence of caliphs and other Muslim notables throughout the early Abbasid period.[101] As Sydney Griffith and David Bertaina have shown, these historic debates served as a paradigm for Christian apologies in a number of literary genres, including popular dialogue texts, on the one hand, and more systematic treatises, on the other.[102]

However, some have tended to see Christian theologians of the early-Abbasid era as having been among the most 'original' thinkers to engage critically with Islam in pre-modern times. David Thomas regards the time of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's activity (ninth century) as Arabic Christianity's 'climactic period of intellectual encounter' with Muslim theological ideas, after which 'only marginal use' was made of them.[103] Thus, according to Thomas, a rich period of 'doctrinal experimentation' by Arabophone Christians came to an end.[104] As sure evidence of this decline, some scholars have cited rises in Muslim intolerance following the early-Abbasid period and the end of Islam's 'formative' phase, after which enough doctrinal fixity in Islam had emerged for Muslims to feel less inclined to debate their beliefs with others. This view is exemplified in one study by Mark Beaumont, who states that 'by the end of the ninth century Muslim intellectuals had

[100] Sydney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 93. On Syriac apologetics of the early Islamic period as '*au fonds* reactive literature', see Gerrit J. Reinink, 'The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam', *Oriens Christianus* 88 (1993): 165–187, here 186; cf. Sydney H. Griffith, 'Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians', in *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Conference* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Historical Institute, Villanova University, 1979), 63–86; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997), 454–476 and 502–504.

[101] See Sydney H. Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period', in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1999), 13–83.

[102] Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*'; David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011). See also Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 99–103 on the question of whether early Syriac and Arabic–Christian polemics and apologetics had a 'historical *fundamentum in re* or basis in real life'.

[103] David Thomas, 'Christian Borrowings from Islamic Theology in the Classical Period: The Witness to al-Juwaynī and Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī', *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 2, no. 1–2 (2014): 125–142, here 129.

[104] Thomas, 'Christian Borrowings from Islamic Theology', 140. For an earlier, similar assessment by Thomas, see idem, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era', in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd V.J. Ridgeon (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 79–98, in which he argues that, however creative and original 'Ammār's attempts to vindicate the doctrine of the Trinity, subsequent apologists would fail to convince Muslims of the reasonableness of this doctrine—a failure which, in Muslim eyes, 'inevitably led to confusion and incoherence' for centuries to come; ibid., 95.

abandoned debate with Christians on the grounds that everything that can be known about revealed truth was contained in Islam'. Meanwhile, the demographic decline of Christian communities and an unspecified 'systematic oppression' under Mongol rule would cause 'the distance between Muslim and Christian intellectuals to grow wider'.[105] As Beaumont would have it, 'between the creative period of the eighth and early ninth centuries and the suppression of the post-Abbasid era, Christian dialogue on Christology with Muslims hardly developed in new directions'.[106] A similar assessment is offered by David Bertaina. In the conclusion to his study on Christian–Muslim dialogue texts, he asserts that the 'decline of the dialogue form had much to do with the shift in court culture and patronage, the changing demographics of the Middle East, and the hardening attitudes of Muslims against religious minorities' combined with 'the construction of [Islamic] theological and legal orthodoxies'.[107] Later dialogue texts, Bertaina contends, merely 'copied and recounted' earlier interreligious encounters that had arisen from a culture of active debate.[108]

Leaving aside the difficult question of when precisely Christians became a minority in the Middle East,[109] and despite such negative assessments of later exchanges, it is noteworthy that the theological encounter between Christianity and Islam beyond the ninth century has occasioned a healthy degree of interest from other scholars. In 1989, Paul Khoury published a multi-volume survey of theological controversy between Arabophone Muslims and Christians from the eighth to twelfth centuries.[110] Some years later, Bénédicte Landron produced her survey of anti-Muslim apologetics and polemics by Nestorian writers which terminates in the early fourteenth century.[111] Further steps have been taken to fill the lacunae in a vast and impressive bibliographical survey overseen by David Thomas, for which there are extensive volumes for the years between 600 to 1914. This reference work accounts for Christian writers from both the Islamicate and Christianate worlds, as well as for Muslim writers spanning the same periods, and has been an invaluable resource for the present study.[112] As for recent monograph-length studies on later medieval Christian–Muslim encounters, we will encounter these over the course of this book.

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[105] Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*, 113.
[106] Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*, 114.
[107] Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 246–247.
[108] Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 246.
[109] See Section 1.7 below for more on the issue of Islamic conversion as it pertains to anti-Muslim apologetic literature.
[110] Paul Khoury, *Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la controverse théologique islamo-chrétienne de langue arabe du VIIIe au XIIe siècle*, 6 vols. (Würzburg: Echter, 1989–2000).
[111] Landron, *Attitudes*. See also above Section 1.3.3.
[112] David Thomas and Alex Mallet (eds), *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 16 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2009–2020).

In a similar vein, this study attempts to understand the Christian Arabic and Syriac apologetic tradition in its later medieval context. In doing so, it is necessary that we move beyond the notion that Christians and Muslims ceased to express any real interest in one another after the first Abbasid centuries. If this were the case, what, then, are we to make of Elias of Nisibis' *majālis* with the vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Maghribī in eleventh-century Nisibis and the *majlis* between the monk George and an Ayyubid emir in thirteenth-century Aleppo?[113] Or the vogue for interreligious debate at the court of the Mongols throughout the thirteenth century?[114] Or a report by Ibn al-Kathīr (d. 1373) of his religious discussions with the Melkite patriarch in Damascus?[115] Nor, however, should we mistake these literary attestations as records of live, dialogic exchanges. Long before the advent of Islam, Christians often enacted fictive and topos-rich theological discussions through the dialogue form.[116] As we shall see in this study, some of the earliest Syriac and Christian Arabic disputation texts contain material from earlier theological and exegetical traditions while, conversely, material from disputation texts could often find their way into systematic *summae*, not least those written by ʿAbdīshōʿ. While the authors of such texts often expressed present-day concerns about the situation of their churches vis-à-vis their Muslim neighbours, they were nevertheless writing for an internal audience, drawing from a deep well of ecclesial literature. The situation on the other side of the religious debate was not much different: Ibn Taymiyya, for example, wrote his famous refutation of Christianity in response to a letter he had seen by an anonymous Christian from Cyprus—and yet, he draws arguments from an extensive corpus of Muslim anti-Christian polemical literature to answer the letter's claims.[117] Nevertheless, such processes of textual reuse should not obscure the fact that interreligious exchange continued

[113] See respectively Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, 'Elias of Nisibis', *CMR* 2 (2010): 727–741, here 730–733 and Mark N. Swanson, 'The Disputation of Jirjī the Monk', *CMR* 4 (2012): 166–172. Bertaina (*Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 231–236) cites these two disputations as examples of how dialogue texts became staid and less popular in later centuries.

[114] See, for example, Benjamin Z. Kedar, 'The Multilateral Disputation at the Court of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1254', in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 162–183; Devin Deweese, "Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī's Religious Encounters at the Mongol Court Near Tabriz', in *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 35–76; George Lane, 'Intellectual Jousting and the Chinggisid Wisdom Bazaars', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 26, no. 1–2 (2016): 235–247; Jonathan Brack, 'Disenchanting Heaven: Interfaith Debate, Sacral Kingship, and Conversion to Islam in the Mongol Empire, 1260–1335', *Past and Present* 250, no. 1 (2021): 11–53.

[115] Discussed in André Naṣṣār, 'Awḍāʿ al-masīḥiyyīn fī Dimashq wa-Ḥalab fī al-ʿaṣr al-Mamlūkī', in *Naḥwa tārīkh thaqāfī li-l-marḥala al-mamlūkiyya*, ed. Maḥmūd Ḥaddād et al. (Beirut: al-Maʿhad al-Almānī li-l-Abḥāth al-Sharqiyya fī Bayrūt, 2010), 41–85, here 48. I am grateful to Feras Krimsty for this reference.

[116] On the fictionalization of theological 'others' in late antique dialogue texts, see Alberto Rigolio, *Christians in Conversation: A Guide to Late Antique Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 13–14.

[117] More on this point in Section 1.9 below. On the sources of Ibn Taymiyya's famous refutation of Christianity entitled *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ*, see Jon Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya', *CMR* 4 (2012): 824–878, here 834–844.

well beyond Wansborough's 'sectarian milieu'—which is to say that a culture of debate *did* exist in ʿAbdīshoʿ's lifetime, though it is unreasonable to expect such exchange to be faithfully recorded in texts written with a one-sided perspective.

As we shall also see throughout this study, ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic writings do not immediately lend themselves to easy historicization, containing as they do multiple layers of earlier material. Thus, rather than attempt to mine such sources for social-historical data, my aim in this book is to frame ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic theology as part of a long and complex intellectual tradition that sought to affirm doctrinal orthodoxies in a largely non-Christian environment, through processes of systematization and compilation, as part of a centuries-long catechetical enterprise. However, as I also hope to show, these processes of compilation did not simply produce a theology of repetition. Rather, they led to the emergence of a rich and authoritative canon of literature that lay at the centre of the Church of the East's confessional identity within a broader, multi-religious environment.

1.5 Syriac Literature between 'Decline' and 'Renaissance'

As previously stated, ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote much of his work in the Syriac language. In order to better situate his apologetics within broader trends in Syriac literature, it is necessary to take note of past scholarship surrounding his oeuvre and that of his contemporaries. Throughout much of the twentieth century, Syriac literature of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries was often studied through the lens of decline and renaissance. In 1934, Jean-Baptiste Chabot viewed the turn of the second millennium as the beginning of 'the decline and end of Syriac literature', due to what he saw as the increasing reliance of its authors on the Arabic language, the reduction of ecclesiastical sees in Muslim territories, the rising intolerance of Muslim rulers, and the ignorance and corruption of the clergy.[118] For similar reasons, Carl Brockelmann believed Syriac literature's decline to have begun as early as the advent of Islam—a decline that would culminate in the careers of ʿAbdīshoʿ of Nisibis and other later authors.[119]

Writing some years later, however, Anton Baumstark judged the tenth to early fourteenth centuries to be a 'renaissance' for the Syriac churches, engendered by the Byzantine reconquest of Antioch, contact with the Crusaders, and the hope—never to be realized—that the Mongol rulers of Iran would eventually convert to Christianity.[120] In Baumstark's scheme, the works of ʿAbdīshōʿ bar

[118] Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Littérature syriaque* (Paris: Bloud and Gray, 1934), 144: 'la décadence et fin de la littérature syriaque'.

[119] Carl Brockelmann et al., *Geschichte der christlichen Litteraturen des Orients* (Leipzig: C.F. Amelang, 1907), 45–64.

[120] *GSL*, 285–286. For a summary of Baumstark's argument, see Herman G.B. Teule, 'The Syriac Renaissance', in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule and Carmen Fotescu Tauwinkel (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 1–31, here 1–3.

Brīkhā and his older, better-known Syrian Orthodox contemporary Gregory Abū al-Faraj bar ʿEbrōyō (alias Barhebraeus, d. 1286) represent the climax of this renaissance, after which we begin to see the 'final decline of [a Syriac] national literature'.[121] Earlier surveys of Syriac literature maintain a similar stance on ʿAbdīshōʿ's legacy: William Wright remarked that after ʿAbdīshōʿ's death 'there are hardly any names among the Nestorians worthy of a place in the literary history of the Syrian nation'[122]—a judgement echoed by Rubens Duval, who added, without qualification, that 'the Mongols left murder and devastation in their wake, and a long period of obscurantism would descend upon Asia'.[123]

Others have dismissed the works of later Syriac writers as products of a baroque literary decadence. Despite recognizing the usefulness of ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's *Catalogue*, William Wright was quick to point out his perceived failings as a litterateur, remarking that

> [a]s a poet he does not shine according to our ideas, although his countrymen admire his verses greatly. Not only is he obscure in vocabulary and style, but he has adopted and even exaggerated all the worse faults of Arabic writers of rimed prose and scribblers of verse.[124]

In his characterization of these unnamed Arabic 'scribblers of verse', Wright may have had in mind the Arabic poetry and belles-lettres of the Mamluk and Mongol (or 'post-classical') periods. Until recently, the literature of that era was widely considered in modern scholarship to have become obscurantist and mannerist, in contrast to the supposed clarity and elegance of earlier periods.[125] Such views are also exemplified in Carl Brockelmann's influential *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*.[126] Little surprise, then, that Brockelmann pours equal scorn on the Syriac poets of the later Middle Ages, describing ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Paradise of Eden* as 'bearing only too clearly the mark of decline'.[127] Similar assessments have been made of an East Syrian contemporary of ʿAbdīshōʿ, Gabriel Qamṣā (d. 1300), metropolitan of Mosul. As Lucas van Rompay notes, Gabriel's prolixity and rare

[121] *GSL*, 326: 'endgültige Verfall des nationalen Schriftums ein'.

[122] Wright, *A Short History*, 290.

[123] Rubens Duval, *Anciennes littératures chrétiennes. 2, La littérature syriaque*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1900), 411: 'les Mongols traînent derrière eux le meurtre et la dévastation et une longue ère d'obscurantisme va s'appesantir sur l'Asie'.

[124] Wright, *A Short History*, 287.

[125] On the problematic and value-laden nature of such terms as 'baroque' and 'post-classical' in the characterization of Mamluk literature in past scholarship, see Thomas Bauer, 'Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches', *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–132, esp. 105–107; idem, 'In Search of "Post-Classical Literature": A Review Article', *Mamluk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 137–167, here 139.

[126] *GAL*, 2:8.

[127] Brockelmann, *Geschichte der christlichen Litteraturen*, 63: 'tragen nur zu deutlich den Stempel des Verfalls'.

vocabulary has 'failed to charm modern scholars', perhaps accounting for the lack of interest in editing—much less studying—his poetic oeuvre.[128]

Herman Teule has recently revisited the much-contested issue of the Syriac Renaissance, this time in light of the receptivity of many of its authors to the scientific, cultural, and religious world of Islam. Whereas Baumstark believed this putative revival to have occurred in spite of Islam, Teule has considered the period in light of its authors' familiarity with Arabo-Islamic models of philosophy, theology, grammar, poetry, historiography, and mysticism.[129] Moreover, Teule has drawn attention to the increasing importance of the Arabic language and its use among representatives of the period such as Bar Shennāyā, most of whose works were written in Arabic rather than Syriac.[130] Other recent scholars have adopted similar approaches, not least Hidemi Takahashi, who has published numerous studies examining the philosophical and scientific indebtedness of Barhebraeus to Muslim intellectuals.[131] Lucas Van Rompay has discussed Syriac literature from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries in terms of a 'consolidation of the Classical Syriac tradition', whereby 'works of an encyclopaedic nature summarise and complement earlier works, taking into account contemporary developments and allowing for borrowings from neighbouring cultures'.[132] Van Rompay further states that the later medieval Syriac literary tradition 'was remoulded into the shape in which it would be further transmitted in the centuries to follow', and that texts by writers such as Barhebraeus and ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā would 'enjoy great popularity and were frequently copied'.[133] Similarly, Heleen Murre-van den Berg has pointed out that the 'overwhelming majority' of East Syrian manuscripts that were copied between 1500 and 1800 contain texts from the twelfth to early fourteenth centuries.[134] In a further study on Syriac scribal cultures of the Ottoman period, Murre-van den Berg notes that it was these very texts—among them many by ʿAbdīshōʿ—that 'provided a strong enough basis for the theology, history, philosophy and grammar of the church of their time'.[135]

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[128] Luke Van Rompay, 'Gabriel Qamṣā', *GEDSH*, 170, citing Jean Maurice Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne: contribution á l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l'Iraq*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965), 1:132–133, who here describes Qamṣā's lengthy poem (*ʿōnīṯā*) on the founding of the monastery of Bēt Qōqē by Sabrīshōʿ as 'desperately vague and prolix' (désespérément vague et très prolixe'), and Anton Baumstark (*GSL*, 284), who simply refers to it as 'a monstrous *ʿōnīṯā*' ('eine monströse 'Onithā').

[129] Herman G.B. Teule, 'The Interaction of Syriac Christianity and the Muslim World in the Period of the Syriac Renaissance', in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam: Past Experiences and Future Perspectives*, ed. Dietmar W. Winkler (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 110–128; Teule, 'The Syriac Renaissance', 23ff.

[130] Teule, 'The Interaction', 11–12.

[131] Barhebraeus's intellectual activities will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.4.

[132] Lucas Van Rompay, 'Past and Present Perceptions of Syriac Literary Tradition', *Hugoye* 3, no. 1 (2000): 71–103, here 96.

[133] Van Rompay, 'Past and Present Perceptions', 96.

[134] Murre-van den Berg, 'Classical Syriac, Neo-Aramaic, and Arabic', 337.

[135] Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures*, 269.

All this would suggest that ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā had as great an impact on the history of Syriac literature as writers from earlier periods. His foundationality in these spheres should prompt us to approach his works and those of his contemporaries on their own terms—not simply as 'later' iterations of a tradition that had long since crystallized and matured. Like the late antique Syriac homilists Ephrem of Nisibis (d. 373), Narsai (d. ca. 500), and Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), medieval writers such as John bar Zōʿbī, ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, Barhebraeus, and Khamīs bar Qardāḥē all employed verse to convey their theology. Yet unlike their late antique forebears, so rarely are their poetic works treated by scholars as *sources* of theology and as a form of intellectual production more generally.[136] Many have instead used their works to 'recover' data about earlier periods of Syriac literature. Such has been the fate of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue*, for example.[137]

One way of treating ʿAbdīshōʿ's written legacy as its own subject of enquiry is by taking an integrative approach to his oeuvre. To do so involves reading his Syriac works—namely his poetic and legal works—alongside his apologetics, the majority of which he wrote in Arabic. ʿAbdīshōʿ's bilingualism should, moreover, prompt us to examine points of contact between his works and those of Muslims and Jews who also employed the Arabic language as a vehicle for religious thought. Indeed, any serious study of medieval Syriac Christian thought must situate itself between three fields: Syriac Studies, Christian Arabic Studies, and Islamic Studies. By glimpsing beyond the disciplinary confines of Syriac literature, it is possible to see ʿAbdīshōʿ work as part of a broader matrix of intellectual cultures.

1.6 Language, Identity, and the Apologetic Agenda

As we observed above, ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote five works that can be considered apologetic, three of which comprise systematic summaries of church doctrine. It is necessary, then, to elaborate on what precisely I mean by 'apologetic'. Broadly speaking, I follow Horst Pöhlmann and Paul Avis in defining apologetics as the method of justifying a religion against external attacks, often by resorting to reason as well as scripture and attempting to build bridges between other worldviews and doctrines.[138] As such, I hold apologetics to be distinct from polemics: if the former can be broadly defined as the art of defence, then the latter is the art of

[136] One recent exception has been Thomas Carlson's treatment of the fifteenth-century theological and liturgical poet Isaac Shbadnāyā; idem, *Christianity in Fifteenth-Century Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), ch. 5. For recent monograph-length studies on the theological poetry of earlier writers, see Jeffrey Wickes, *Bible and Poetry in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Ephrem's Hymns on Faith* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Philip Michael Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh* (Oxford: University Press, 2018).

[137] On this use of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue*, see Childers, "Abdisho' bar Brikha', 3.

[138] Horst Pöhlmann, 'Apologetics', in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al., 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 2:102–104; Paul Avis, 'Apologetics', in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31–32.

attack. However, as briefly noted above, ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Pearl* and *Profession* exhibit polemical themes alongside apologetic ones, thus making it necessary to problematize the distinction between these two categories. As Aryeh Kasher points out, the line between polemical and apologetic methods of argumentation is superficial since the two are often interwoven. For example, in his *Contra Apionem*, the famous Romano-Jewish writer Josephus (d. ca. 100) seeks not only to defend Jewish culture from Hellenistic attacks but also to establish its superiority over others.[139] Although ʿAbdīshōʿ nowhere explicitly states that Christianity is superior to Islam, he nevertheless believes his faith to be the only true one—despite all attempts to build bridges with his interlocutor. As such, the modern distinction between 'positive apologetics' (evidentiary arguments for the truth of a religion) and 'negative apologetics' (the removal of barriers between religions in response to critical attacks) is a blurry one where ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology is concerned; in effect, our author seeks to do both.[140]

A further instructive parallel between ʿAbdīshōʿ and a figure like Josephus is that both authors sought to defend their own communal identities from within the very culture they saw as dominant. For ʿAbdīshōʿ, the cultural patrimony that was so central to his ecclesial community was Christian and Syriac-speaking. In the linguistic context, this is nowhere more evident than in his *Paradise of Eden*, where in the preface he castigates Arab writers who cite the famous *Maqāmāt* of Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1122) as proof of their language's superiority to Syriac:

> Some Arabs (*nāšīn man hāḵēl ʾarāḇāyē*), who are poets in the elegance of diction and grammarians in the art of composition, castigated in their stupidity and foolishness the Syriac tongue as being impoverished, unpolished, and dull. At the present time, they ascribe and attribute the beauty and abundance of subtleties to their [own] language, and at all times and before all men they bring forward as proof the book which they call *Maqāmāt*. They look down on the poets and orators of every [other] language, while the compilation of fifty stories—interwoven with all sorts of fictions, which men of intelligence will upon examination realize are [nothing more than] a colourful bird and plastered sepulchres—they praise, glorify, and exalt, and in them they take pride and boast. Therefore, it has befallen to me, a most obscure Syrian and feeble Christian (*ʾallīlā d-suryāyē wa-mḥīlā da-mšīḥāyē*), to show my indignation against the folly of their arrogance and to pull down the height of their criticism.

[139] Aryeh Kasher, 'Polemic and Apologetic Methods of Writing in *Contra Apionem*', in *Josephus' Contra Apionem: Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levison (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 143–186, here 143–144.

[140] On these two types of apologetics, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 23–25.

> I shall gain a victory for our language, which is the oldest of all, and scatter its detractors with catapults of justice.[141]

Some scholars have suggested that non-Muslim Mongol rule in the Middle East enabled Christians to voice attacks against the Arabo-Islamic culture of their day.[142] This argument seems rather unconvincing to me since Syriac writers from much earlier periods complained about the boasting of Arabs in strikingly similar terms. This occurs, for example, in a poem on calendrical calculations attributed to George of the Arabs (d. 724 or 726) though more likely composed after 888/9.[143] At the beginning of the treatise, the author mentions a pagan (*[ʾ]nāš men ḥanpē*, i.e., a Muslim Arab) who, being 'puffed up with pride' (*kaḏ meštaqqal*), boasts that the Arab poets alone were granted the ability to speak of computations 'in measured speech' (*melṯā tqīltā*). In refutation of this claim, the author composes a homily in equally measured verse (*melṯā tqīltā d-ḇāh ʾeštaḇhar haw barnāšā*).[144] Further examples of responses to Arab critics of the Syriac language include a treatise on Aristotelian rhetoric by Anthony of Tagrīt (fl. ca. 750–950) and the poetics of the *Book of Dialogues* by Jacob bar Shakkō (d. 1241).[145]

With that said, there were by ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime claims that al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* was inimitable in its beauty. This was the opinion of one commentator of the *Maqāmāt*, Nāṣir ibn ʿAbd al-Sayyid al-Muṭarrizī (d. 1213). In his estimation, no other work among the books of the non-Arabs could rival al-Ḥarīrī's masterpiece.[146] The claim is evocative of the trope in Islamic literature of the Qurʾān's miraculous inimitability (*iʿjāz*, on which more below). As has recently been pointed out, the literary standard set by the *Maqāmāt* was not so much a challenge to the infallibility of the Qurʾān but rather a reflection of 'the broader concept that the *Ḥarīriyya* and the Qurʾān were linked through the concept of

[141] *Paradise*, 2–3. I base my translation, with minor modifications, on Naoya Katsumata, 'The Style of the *Maqāma*: Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Syriac', *Middle Eastern Literatures* 5, no. 5 (2002): 117–137, here 122.

[142] Katsumata, 'The Style of the *Maqāma*', 122; Younansardaroud, "Aḇdīšōʿ bar Brīḵā's Book of Paradise', 202–203. More will be said about the nature of Mongol rule in the Middle East and its implications for non-Muslims in the following chapter.

[143] Ps.-George of the Arabs, *Mēmrā b-nīšā Mār(y) Yaʿqūḇ meṭṭol krōnīqōn*, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek syr. 236 (olim 121), 109v–116, partially transcribed in Sachau, *Verzeichniss*, 2:720–721. A critical edition is forthcoming from George Kiraz. The treatise is almost certainly a pseudo-epigraph, or else a mistaken attribution, since the author later states that in order to compute the base of Lent, you must ignore the first 1200 Seleucid years (ibid., 113v–114r). Thus, the text could not have been written before 888/9 CE I am grateful to George Kiraz for this point.

[144] Ps.-George, *Mēmrā*, 109v–110r.

[145] Anthony of Tagrīt, *The Fifth Book of the Rhetoric of Antony of Tagrit*, ed. and tr. John W. Watt, CSCO 480–481 (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 2 (text), 2 (trans.); Jacob bar Shakkō, *Mēmrā tlīṯāyā da-ḵṯābā qaḏmāyā d-D̤ʾālōḡō d-ʿal ʾummānūṯā hāy paʾwīṭīqāytā*, Jean Pierre Martin, *De la métrique chez les syriens* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1879), 8 (text), 16 (trans.).

[146] Cited and discussed in length by Mathew L. Keegan, 'Throwing the Reins to the Reader: Hierarchy, Jurjānian Poetics, and al-Muṭarrizī's Commentary on the *Maqāmāt*', *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 5 (2018): 105–145, here 106.

iʿjāz'.[147] Thus, given the theological associations of the *Maqāmāt*'s Arabic prose, it is likely that ʿAbdīshōʿ sought to compete with the genre by distancing the Syriac language from it. Indeed, al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* bears little technical resemblance to the ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Paradise*: the former is a book of rhymed prose on the picaresque misadventures of its protagonist, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, while the latter is a collection of theological poems which follow traditional Syriac metrical schemes, along with artifices invented by ʿAbdīshōʿ himself.[148] Though each comprises fifty sections written in a virtuosic style, they are nevertheless representative of two very different literary traditions. The *Paradise of Eden*, therefore, is not a product of imitation as William Wright supposed when he dismissed the work as containing 'the worse faults of Arabic writers of rimed prose and scribblers of verse'.[149] Rather, it is an attempt to affirm Syriac literature's literary and religious autonomy from Classical Arabic models that ʿAbdīshōʿ regarded as hegemonic. He does this by seizing on an age-old topos in Syriac writing about verse and rhetoric: the boasting Arab who would diminish the linguistic heritage of the Syrians. By singling out the popularity of the al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, ʿAbdīshōʿ updates this topos for a contemporary audience.

Yet here we are presented with something of a contradiction. If ʿAbdīshōʿ was such a stalwart defender of the Syriac language, what, then, are we to make of the fact that he wrote a significant proportion of his oeuvre in Arabic? As we shall see in this book, ʿAbdīshōʿ makes frequent use of Arabic poetry and belles-lettres to articulate key points of Christian doctrine. This would suggest that he was not only interested in utilizing the Arabic language but also its attendant literary canon. We even encounter this familiarity with *adab* conventions in his Syriac *Paradise*. Although the work itself differs from al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* in its formal features, it nevertheless echoes some aspects of the Arabic literary tradition, namely in its use of *ubi sunt* themes in one of its discourses on the afterlife (as we shall see in Chapter 5). One way to approach this apparent tension comes from Patricia Crone's study of nativist movements in early Islamic Iran. Concerned with tracing early Islamic religious uprisings in the Iranian countryside to non-normative forms of Zoroastrianism that survived the collapse of the Sasanian 'church' in the seventh century, Crone argues that such movements were nativist in outlook because they sought to revitalize a sense of ancestral belonging while appropriating 'powerful concepts from the hegemonic community'.[150] Of course, there are important distinctions to be made here. Though undoubtedly restorationist in their hostile attitudes towards Umayyad authority, the religious views espoused by Crone's nativists have been characterized by historians as

[147] Keegan, 'Throwing the Reins to the Reader', 141.
[148] Katsumata, 'The Style of the *Maqāma*', 129.
[149] Wright, *A Short History*, 287. See also discussion in previous section.
[150] Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 166.

'popular' and 'low church'.[151] This cannot be said of ʿAbdīshōʿ's championing of Syriac, long since the Church of the East's official language of liturgy, scholarship, and theological instruction. Nevertheless, a restorationist agenda arguably lies at the heart of ʿAbdīshōʿ's project, particularly in the area of Syriac poetry, and that of other Syriac poets of his day such as Gabriel of Qamṣā (mentioned in the previous section). The rarefied vocabulary and virtuosic style of these authors speak of an anxiety about the waning importance of the Syriac language in response to the established prestige of Arabic. Scholars have observed a similar phenomenon in the cases of Greek in the monasteries of Palestine in the ninth century and Latin in Islamic Spain, where Christian writers exhibited concerns about the encroaching status of Arabic.[152] And yet, like the nativists of Crone's study, bilingual Syriac Christian writers in the Middle Ages were prepared to utilize concepts and symbols from a competing literary culture in order to buttress their own religious claims. Seen in this light, we may begin to understand similar tensions in the writings of Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046), an East Syrian writer of comparable significance to ʿAbdīshōʿ. In his famous Muslim–Christian disputation entitled *Kitāb al-Majālis* ('Book of Sessions'), Elias alleges that the sciences of the Arabs had been passed down to them by the Syrian Christians (*al-suryāniyyūn*), while the Syrian Christians had nothing to learn from the Arabs.[153] Yet this fact (as Elias saw it) did not prevent him from drawing on Arabo-Islamic sources to advance a Christian notion of personal piety in his *Dafʿ al-hamm* ('Dispensation of Sorrow').[154] Throughout the present study, we will encounter similar instances in which ʿAbdīshōʿ engages with Arabo-Islamic literature in order express markedly Christian ideas.

A further way to understand ʿAbdīshōʿ's relationship with the Arabic language is by viewing it as a form of literary cosmopolitanism. The notion of cosmopolitanism has been used by Sheldon Pollock to characterize the emergence of Sanskritic culture in South Asia as a dominant literary and epistemic space.

[151] This has often been said of the Khurramī movement, for example; see Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, 22–27.

[152] For the dense and labyrinthine style of the Mozarabic hagiographer Eulogius of Córdoba (d. 857) as an expression of *latinitas*, see Christian Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 216–221. For a similar assessment of the florid and archaicizing style of the Greek of the *Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba*, composed in Palestine in the late eighth or early ninth centuries, see ibid., 218, n. 77.

[153] Elias bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-Majālis li-Mār Ilīyā muṭrān Naṣībīn wa-risālatuhu ilā al-wazīr al-Kāmil Abī al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghribī*, ed. Nikolai Selezneyov (Moscow: Grifon, 2017), 105–138. See also David Bertaina, 'Science, Syntax, and Superiority in Eleventh-century Christian–Muslim Discussion: Elias of Nisibis on the Arabic and Syriac Languages', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 22, no. 2 (2011): 197–207. Elias's main contention in this *majlis* is that Syriac grammar and orthography are clearer and less ambiguous than those of Arabic, and so the clarity of the language of Christian scripture is proof of its veracity.

[154] See Ayşe İçöz, 'Defining a Christian Virtue in the Islamic Context: The Concept of Gratitude in Elias of Nisibis' *Kitāb dafʿ al-hamm*, *Ilahiyat* 9, no. 2 (2018): 165–182. Elias explicitly cites a work on ethics by the famous Muslim philosopher Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī (d. 873).

Emphasizing the relationship between culture and power, Pollock identifies what he refers to as a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' that was transregional in character and came to embody a universalist discourse that would eventually displace regionalized forms of literature.[155] It is possible to situate ʿAbdīshōʿ's thought at the intersection of two competing cosmopoleis: Syriac and Arabic. The former—Syriac—may be considered a cosmopolis insofar as it was a mainly written language used for liturgical and scholarly purposes within various Christian confessions, particularly among members of the clergy. Furthermore, like Pollock's Sanskrit cosmopolis, Syriac by the thirteenth century certainly constituted a transregional *koinē*, albeit one limited to certain ecclesial groups. In the case of the Church of the East, the use of Syriac stretched as far west as Cyprus and as far east as Central Asia and China, having impacted regional languages and communities such as Sogdian, Turkic, and Mongolian in the form of translations, loanwords, and use of Syriac and Syriac-derived scripts.[156] The latter cosmopolis—Arabic—encompassed a much broader network of literatures in lands where Arabic was both the language of the Qurʾān, the sciences, and vested power. By the thirteenth century this network stretched from Islamic Spain to parts of China,[157] and was thus felt by Syriac Christian writers such as ʿAbdīshōʿ to constitute a hegemonic and majoritarian force. Yet, despite the apparent inequality of these two cosmopoleis, he was able to draw on and navigate both to express notions of Christian belonging and exclusion.

Others have questioned the applicability of cosmopolitanism to pre-modern contexts, given the term's secular connotations.[158] This might certainly apply to Syriac and Christian Arabic literature for which theological texts are so

[155] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 10–36.

[156] See Barakatullo Ashurov, 'Sogdian Christian Texts: Socio-Cultural Observations', *Archiv Orientální* 83 (2015): 53–70; Pier Giorgio Borbone, 'Syroturkica 1: The Önggüds and the Syriac Language', in *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, ed. George Kiraz (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 1–17; idem, 'Syro-Mongolian Greetings for the King of France: A Note about the Letter of Hülegü to King Louis IX (1262)', *Studi classici e orientali* 61, no. 1 (2015): 479–484.

[157] For a fruitful application of Pollock's model to the spread of Arabic throughout South and South-East Asia, see Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011). Of further relevance here is Shahab Ahmed's conception of a 'Balkans-to-Bengal Complex', a temporal and geographical network of literary matrices in which Persianate culture served as a theological and scientific grammar across a vast landmass for several centuries until the modern period; idem, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 32. Ahmed's ideas will be discussed in further detail below.

[158] Such has been the criticism by Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his World: The Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 7. In her assessment of Maimonides' engagement with non-Jewish forms of knowledge production, Stroumsa states: 'In modern parlance, [Maimonides] could perhaps be called "cosmopolitan," that is, a person who belongs to more than one of the subcultures that together form the world in which he lives. This last term grates, however, because of its crude anachronism as well as because of its (equally anachronistic) secular overtones.'

foundational. Nevertheless, Pollock's conceptual framework has been fruitfully applied by Daniel Sheffield in his study of Zoroastrian narratives of Zarathustra in medieval and pre-modern times. Here, Sheffield demonstrates how Zoroastrian communities in both Iran and India employed 'cosmopolitan religious vocabularies' from the Persianate and Sanskritic literary traditions in order to resemanticize centuries of Avestan and Pahlavi heritage, adapting them to a rapidly changing world in which they held little to no political sway.[159] Sarah Stroumsa, though she does not employ the term 'cosmopolitan', has brought similar approaches to bear on the intellectual history of Jews in Islamic Spain, where the Arabic language served as a cultural *koinē* among Muslims and Jews, 'a common cultural platform for thinkers of different religious and ethnic backgrounds'.[160] Similarly, for Syriac Christian writers like ʿAbdīshōʿ, Arabic served as a transconfessional and transregional *koinē* through which inherited religious concepts could be reinscribed for an audience that was both Syriac Christian by confession and conversant in Arabic literary norms. Examples that we will encounter in this study include (but are not limited to) ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of Avicennan philosophical locutions to express Trinitarian dogmas, and *ḥadīth* and Arabic prosody to articulate Syriac liturgical and historiographical traditions surrounding the Christian call to prayer.

With that said, it would be wrong to see ʿAbdīshōʿ as merely instrumentalizing the Arabic language for apologetic gain. We should not forget that by the thirteenth century, Arabic had long been a spoken language among Christians throughout the Islamic world as well as in pre-Islamic times.[161] In the first three centuries after the Arab conquests, a thriving Christian Arabic literature emerged in the Melkite centres of Palestine and Egypt.[162] Further east in the same period, one finds suggestion of an Arab identity among members of the Church of the East. Consider, for example, the famous philosopher and translator Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 873), who belonged to a group of Arab Christians from al-Ḥīra known as the ʿIbād.[163] Of further significance is the *Apology of al-Kindī* (ca. tenth century), a purported exchange between a Christian (likely a Nestorian) and his Muslim friend.[164] The former is named ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, a Christian from the Arab

[159] Daniel Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet: Medieval and Early Modern Narratives of the Life of Zarathustra in Islamic Iran and Western India' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012), 1–33.

[160] Sarah Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and its History in Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 4–6.

[161] Although Christianity among the Arabs is well-attested in the pre-Islamic Middle East, there is little direct evidence for the existence of a Christian Arabic literature prior to the emergence of Islam. On this issue, see Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 6–11.

[162] See Sidney H. Griffith, 'The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic', *The Muslim World* 78, no. 1 (1988): 1–28.

[163] Gotthard Strohmaier, 'Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq' *EI*^{3} 3 (2017): 73–83. On the designation "Ibād', see Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥîra: eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 88–91.

[164] On this work's possible Nestorian origins, see George Tartar (ed.), 'Ḥiwār islāmī-masīḥī fī ʿahd al-khalīfat al-Ma'mūn (813–834): Risālat al-Hāshimī wa-risālat al-Kindī' (PhD diss., University of Social Sciences, Strasbourg, 1988), xii.

tribe of al-Kinda (*kindī al-aṣl*). In his letter, al-Kindī states that female excision (*khafḍ al-nisāʾ*), like male circumcision, is not stipulated by Christian revelation, though it is the custom of the Arabs (*ʿamilat al-ʿarab bihi ʿalā ḥasab mā jarat sunnat al-balad*). He continues that were religion not nobler than bodily matters, he would be silent on this matter, since he too is a descendant of Ishmael, the progenitor of the Arabs (*idh anā ayḍan min wuld Ismāʿīl*).[165]

Thus, what we commonly refer to as 'Syriac Christianity' does not necessarily point to the Syriac language, any more than Latin Christianity points to the Latin language or Lutheran points to German. Given these entangled linguistic, cultural, and ecclesial identities, it is easy to see how Syriac Christian authors themselves were immersed in the very literary culture to which they sometimes expressed opposition. This connectedness to the broader Arabic-speaking environment is notable in ʿAbdīshōʿ's rhymed translation of the East Syrian Gospel lectionary. Samir Khalil has seen this work as an implicit response to the Muslim claim that the Qurʾān is miraculously unique in its poetic beauty.[166] While he may be correct, we should also note that the use of rhymed Arabic prose (*sajʿ*), common to both *maqāmāt* and the Qurʾān, also reflects the tastes of literate circles in ʿAbdīshōʿ's time and is, therefore, not merely an apologetic strategy.[167] To be sure, some of the earliest Arabic translations of the Syriac Bible, from the ninth century onwards, contain notable Qurʾānic valences. The reason for this may well have been apologetic at first, since scripture was often held to be the highest form of revelation, and so the Bible's earliest Christian Arabic translators sought to make the base text relevant to a current generation of Arabic readers. By ʿAbdīshōʿ's time, the situation becomes more complicated, since the encoding status of Arabic—a language associated with an authoritative Islamic text and a proselytizing community—meant that such Qurʾānic valences were often unconscious, having been normalized long after the first Arabic Bible translations appeared.[168] The persistence of Qurʾān-inflected vocabulary in *biblia arabica* in

[165] Tartar, 'Ḥiwār islāmī-masīḥī', 139.

[166] Samir Khalil Samir, 'Une réponse implicite à l'*iʿǧāz* du Coran: l'Évangéliaire rimé de 'Abdišūʿ', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 35 (1985): 225–237. Here, Samir cites in support of this thesis an apology for the Gospels composed in 1245 by the Copto-Arabic author al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, in which he dismisses the literary beauty of the Qurʾān as mere 'linguistic artifice' (*ṣināʿa lafẓiyya*); ibid., 10. On the Qurʾān's purported inimitability, see Gustave E. von Grunebaum, 'Iʿdjāz, *EI²* 3 (1986): 1018–1020.

[167] For the popularity of *maqāmāt* in medieval Arabic literary circles, see Rina Drory, '*Maqāma*', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 2009), 507–508; Muhsin Musawi, 'Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose', in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and Donald Sydney Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 99–133.

[168] For intertextual allusions (conscious and unconscious) to Qurʾānic vocabulary in Arabic translations of the Bible with a Syriac *Vorlage*, see Sydney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 64, 242; Ronny Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 189–190; Miriam L. Hjälm, 'Scriptures beyond Words: "Islamic" Vocabulary in Early Christian Arabic Bible Translations', *Colectanea Christiana Orientalia* 15 (2018): 49–69.

the thirteenth century suggests that while such linguistic choices may once have been apologetic, during ʿAbdīshōʿ's time they had become part of a long-established literary idiom. ʿAbdīshōʿ suggests as much in the preface of his *Rhymed Gospels*, where he sets out his reasons for translating the Peshitta-based Syriac lectionary. Nowhere does he mention Muslims or the Qurʾān. He does, however, register a pastoral concern for balancing the exigencies of literary refinement with those of clarity, comprehension, and faithfulness to the original Syriac:

> Since translation from one language to another should be without perversion and alteration of meaning, confusion of the sentences of words and their passages, and the deviation of statements from the intention of their author, while attempting eloquence in the language of translation and the necessary conditions regarding obscure words in both languages—this is the approved model and the foundation on which it is based. Thus, I have pursued this path in my translation of the Gospel readings into the Arabic language, with words from authoritative commentary and interpretation.
>
> For before me, there were translators who neglected these conditions, concerned [only] with translation using basic words, like the master Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib,[169] chief of the moderns (*raʾīs al-mutaʾakhkhirīn*), and Mār Īshūʿyahb ibn Malkūn, metropolitan of Nisibis[170] (may God sanctify their souls and illuminate their tombs). Since their intention was to educate the masses with simple words, they chose the most basic of terminologies. As for the master Ibn Dādīshūʿ[171] (may God have mercy on him), for all his claims to high style in his translation and expressions of his [own] virtuosity and merit, he confused the sentences of the words, disturbed the structure of the verses, altered proper names in an arabising fashion (*ghayyara al-asmāʾ taʿrīban*), and corrupted titles in a foreign way. This is the most abominable of sins and flagrancies and the most repulsive innovation and fabrication, since it is not approved by the law, nor is it recited from the pulpits of the Church (*manābir al-bīʿa*).[172]

[169] We know that the famous Baghdad peripatetic and churchman Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043) produced an Arabic translation of the Syriac *Diatessaron* (see Aaron Butts, 'Ibn al-Ṭayyib', *GEDSH*, 206–207), though ʿAbdīshōʿ seems to be referring to previous translations of the Gospel lectionary rather than those of the Bible broadly speaking.

[170] In his *Catalogue*, ʿAbdīshōʿ lists for Īshūʿyab ibn Malkūn (i.e., Īshōʿyab bar Malkōn, d. before 1233) 'questions and *mēmrē* on grammar, letters, and hymns (*ʿōnyāṯā*)'—but no lectionary translations. ʿAbdīshōʿ's ommission is unsurprising since he later tells us that Īshōʿyaḇ's translation was poor and unfit for purpose. For Īshōʿyab's surviving works, see Luke van Rompay, 'Ishoʿyahb bar Malkon', *GEDSH*, 216.

[171] Reading Ibn Dādīshūʿ (i.e., the Syriac name Dādīshōʿ) with Samir Khalil Samir, 'La Préface de l'évangéliaire rimé de 'Abdīšū' de Nisibe', *Proche Orient Chrétien* 33 (1983): 19–33, here § 78, against the 'Ibn Dāwūd' of Sami Khouri's edition. I have not managed to find any traces of this author and his Bible translation. Samir Khalil ('La Préface', 30, n. 73) suggests that he flourished in the tenth century, and was the recipient of an epistle by Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974); see idem, 'Science divine et théorie de la connaissance chez Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī', *Annales de Philosophie* 7 (1986): 85–115.

[172] Bar Brīkhā, *Anājīl*, 1:89; Samir, 'La Préface', § 59–88.

In other words, finding that previous renderings of the Gospel lectionary were either too simple or too embellished, ʿAbdīshōʿ sought to strike a balance between high style and comprehension, ultimately settling on rhymed prose. It comes as no surprise, then, that ʿAbdīshōʿ's other Arabic works, namely his *Durra, Farāʾid*, and *Khuṭba*, are replete with rhyming prose. It is also a stylistic feature of an earlier, vast compendium of Nestorian dogma, the *Kitāb al-Majdal* of ʿAmr ibn Mattā (fl. early eleventh century).[173]

A further way to problematize ʿAbdīshōʿ's engagement with the Arabic language comes from Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam? The Importance of being Islamic*. In this programmatic study, Ahmed critiques what he views as reductionist definitions of Islam, arguing that such cultural phenomena as Avicennan philosophy, wine poetry, and libertinism are every bit as constitutive of Islam as, say, Islamic law or *ḥadīth* literature. With respect to non-Muslims in the Islamic world, Ahmed asserts that the famous Jewish thinker Maimonides (d. 1204) formulated his ideas 'in the discursive context, dialectical framework, and conceptual vocabulary of Islamic philosophy, *kalām*-theology, and *fiqh*-jurisprudence', such that he may even be considered 'Islamic'.[174] Although he has little more to say about non-Muslims, Ahmed's bold assertion might also apply to ʿAbdīshōʿ were it not for the fact that ʿAbdīshōʿ himself makes explicit claims in his apologetics to *not* being Islamic, despite his rootedness in a common Arabophone culture. What I wish to draw attention to instead, is that since ʿAbdīshōʿ appears, in different contexts, to participate in both Syriac and Arabophone worlds, it is necessary to articulate a more nuanced approach to understanding the complex and often shifting relationship between language and identity in his apologetics.

Such an approach comes from an older study: Marshall Hodgson's influential *Venture of Islam*. In this path-breaking work, Hodgson famously coined the term 'Islamicate' to describe that which does 'not refer to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims'.[175] The term 'Islamicate' came under serious scrutiny by Shahab Ahmed, who viewed it as reductively 'religionist', relegating as it does things like philosophy, science, and poetry to mere 'culture'—in other words, bugs rather than features of Islam.[176] Yet, having thrived for centuries under Muslim rule, the Church of East of ʿAbdīshōʿ's day could reasonably be considered part of the social

[173] See Bo Holmberg, 'Language and Thought in *Kitāb al-Majdal, bāb 2, faṣl 1, al-dhurwa*', in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in ʿAbbasid Iraq*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 159–75.

[174] Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 174–175.

[175] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:59.

[176] Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 159–175.

and cultural complex that Hodgson postulates. Hodgson described a 'lettered tradition . . . naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims'.[177] This shared lettered tradition further provides the context to many of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Arabic works, even though he appears to disavow it in his *Paradise of Eden*. As such, the term 'Islamicate' allows us to frame the cultural production of Christians living under Muslim rule in a far more satisfactory way than does Ahmed's maximalist definition of Islam. For it allows us to consider the entangled and shifting nature of ʿAbdīshōʿ's 'insider' and 'outsider' status in the world in which he lived, thereby revealing what Aryeh Kasher has observed in Josephus: that '[f]rom the literary viewpoint, this phenomenon is typical of those who lived and received their education in two cultures, but belonged to or identified with one of them, without detaching themselves from the other.'[178]

1.7 The Texture, Function, and Audience of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Apologetics

Having broadly defined the genre of apologetics, we now turn to the question of how such a category was conceived by pre-modern Syriac and Christian Arabic writers. The most common Syriac equivalent to the Greek ἀπολογία is *mappaq b-rūḥā*, meaning 'defence', 'excuse', or 'refutation', but can also be used to signify a preface to a work in which the author sets out his reasons for composing it.[179] One also encounters in Syriac the much rarer *ʾapōlōgīyā*,[180] a direct loan from the Greek. Syriac writers used both terms to denote works of religious controversy—as occurs, for example, in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue*[181]—but its application is neither systematic nor consistent. As for Arabic, one finds a wide-ranging nomenclature for works written in defence of a religion, including *radd* ('response'), *ḥujja* ('argument'), *iḥtijāj* ('objection'), and many others.[182] In ʿAbdīshōʿ's case, however, none of these terms occur in the title of his works defending Christianity. This is because the vindication of Christianity is but one function of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology. As will become clearer, his theology seeks to educate an internal audience

[177] Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:58.

[178] Kasher, 'Polemic and Apologetic Methods of Writing', 145.

[179] An early instance is in the Peshitta, e.g., in Luke 21:14 and Acts 22:1. It is also the term used in the Syriac translation of Aristides's *Apology*; see Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–1901), 2426–2427 and Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 808. For *mappaq b-rūḥā* as preface, see Riad, *Studies in Syriac Preface*, 22–23.

[180] Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 332–333; Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 82.

[181] As, for example, in his entry for Theodoret of Cyrrhus; *Catalogue*, 55 (text), 161 (trans.).

[182] Daniel Gimaret, 'Radd', *EI²* 8 (1995): 362–363; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 89ff.

about the core features of Christianity while equipping them against external theological challenges—a strategy that is as much catechetical as it is apologetic.

ʿAbdīshōʿ was by no means the first to work within this paradigm of theology. By the thirteenth century, there existed a highly developed genre of Christian Arabic and, to a lesser extent, Syriac theological exposition, which I refer to here as the *summa theologica*. The types of works falling under this category are summary and comprehensive expositions of ecclesiastical dogma. The earliest text that might be considered a *summa* was written in Greek by John of Damascus (d. 749) and is known as *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Ἐκδοσις ακριβής της ορθοδόξου πίστεως, or *De Fide Orthodoxa*).[183] It begins with a discussion of the existence of God, His relationship to creation, his Triune nature and attributes, and ends in an exposition of Christological and eschatological doctrines. John's *De Fide Orthodoxa* is arguably among the earliest known attempts to systematize what had already become a well-developed patristic tradition, thereby contributing to the formalization of an authoritative body of church dogma.[184] The work would serve as a highly influential model for later Byzantine systematic dogmatics, and it was not long before a similar kind of genre emerged in the Arabic-speaking Melkite milieu of the ninth century.[185] Sydney Griffith first drew attention to the earliest known Christian *summa* in the Arabic language, produced in ca. 877 (or at least a decade prior) known as *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-imān* ('Summary of the Aspects of the Faith'). Griffith has rightly emphasized the apologetic dimension of the *Jāmiʿ*, inspired as it was by debates with a group referred to as the *ḥunafā'* (i.e., Muslims, echoing both the Syriac *ḥanpē* and the description of Abraham in Q 3:67).[186] As such, it treats key areas of dogma alongside such issues as apostasy from Christianity and Muslim accusations of polytheism.[187]

Yet virtually nothing is understood of this genre's continued development, despite its widespread presence among Christian communities, regardless of confession, living under Muslim rule over several centuries (see Table 1.3).

[183] The work is part of a broader collection called the *Fount of Knowledge*, which includes John's famous treatise *On Heresies* (*Περὶ ερέσεον*); see Vassa Conticello, 'Jean Damascène', in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, ed. Robert Goulet, 7 vols. (Paris: CNRS, 2000), 3:989–1012.

[184] Vassa Kontouma, 'At the Origins of Byzantine Systematic Dogmatics: the *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* of St John of Damascus', in *John of Damascus: New Studies on his Life and Works* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2015), VI.

[185] Although John of Damascus's *De Fide Orthodoxa* anticipated the proliferation of *summa*-writing in the Chalcedonian milieu, it is unclear whether his work directly influenced the genre in adjacent Christian communities in the Middle East, since it was not translated into Arabic until the tenth century; see Alexandre M. Roberts, *Reason and Revelation in Byzantine Antioch: The Christian Translation Program of Abdallah Ibn al-Fadl* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 27, 212, 296.

[186] Sidney H. Griffith, 'Islam and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica, Rābiʿ* I, 264 A.H.', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 225–264, here 245.

[187] For a summary of contents, see Robert G. Hoyland, 'St Andrews Ms. 14 and the Earliest Arabic *summa theologiae*, its Date, Authorship and Apologetic Context', in *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. Wout van Bekkum (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 159–172, here 160–163.

Although compilatory in scale, these works tended to (i) be original compositions, as opposed to, say, florilegia (collections of testimonia and extracts[188]); (ii) written in prose, unlike, say, metrical homilies; and (iii) comprise several chapters on various subjects within the religious sciences. Table 1.3 provides us with an idea of just how commonplace the genre was within Syriac and Christian Arabic circles between the ninth and fourteenth centuries:

Table 1.3 List of *summae*, ninth to fourteenth centuries

	Author	Title	Lang.	Confession	Date
1.	Unknown	*al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-imān*	Ar.	Melkite	ca. 877[189]
2.	ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d. 840–50)	*K. al-Burhān ʿalā siyāqat al-tadbīr al-ilāhī*	Ar.	Nestorian	—[190]
3.	Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. after 987)	*K. al-Bayān al-mukhtaṣar fī al-īmān*	Ar.	Copt	—[191]
4.	Pseudo-Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī	*K. al-Burhān fī al-dīn*	Ar.	Jacobite (?)	ca. 10th CE. (?)[192]
5.	ʿAmr ibn Mattā (fl. early eleventh CE.)	*K. al-Majdal fī al-istibṣār wa-l-jadal*	Ar.	Nestorian	ca. 1000[193]
6.	ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl (d. after 1052)	*K. al-Manfaʿa*	Ar.	Melkite	ca. 1043–52[194]
7.	Muṭrān Dāwūd (fl. eleventh CE.)	*K. al-Kamāl*	Ar.	Maronite	ca. 1059[195]
8.	Pseudo-Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ	*K. al-Īḍāḥ*	Ar.	Copt	ca. eleventh CE.[196]

Continued

[188] For surveys of dogmatic florilegia in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition, Volume 2: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, tr. Pauline Allen and John Cawte (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 51–78 and Alexander Alexakis, 'Byzantine Florilegia', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, ed. Ken Parry (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 15–50, esp. 28–32.

[189] Mark N. Swanson, 'al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān', *CMR* 1 (2009): 791–798.

[190] Mark Beaumont, "Ammār al-Baṣrī', *CMR* 1 (2009): 604–610.

[191] Mark N. Swanson, 'Sāwīrūs ibn al-Muqaffaʿ', *CMR* 2 (2010): 491–509, here 504–507.

[192] Emilio Platti, 'Kitāb al-burhān fī al-dīn', *CMR* 2 (2010): 554–556.

[193] Mark N. Swanson, 'Kitāb al-majdal', *CMR* 2 (2010): 627–632.

[194] Alexander Treiger, 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl, *CMR* 3 (2011): 89–113, here 92–98.

[195] Mark N. Swanson, 'Muṭrān Dāʾūd', *CMR* 3 (2011): 130–132.

[196] Mark N. Swanson, 'Kitāb al-īḍāḥ', *CMR* 3 (2011): 265–269.

Table 1.3 *Continued*

	Author	Title	Lang.	Confession	Date
9.	Abū Naṣr Yaḥyā ibn Jarīr (ca. 1103/4)	*al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid ilā al-falāḥ wa-l-najāḥ al-hādī min al-tīh ilā sabīl al-najāt*, or *K. al-Murshid*	Ar.	Jacobite	—[197]
10.	Anonymous (ca. eleventh CE.)	*K. d-ʿAl ʾīḏaʿṯā da-šrārā*, or *ʿEllaṯ d-ḵol ʿellān*	Syr.	Jacobite	ca. eleventh ce.[198]
11.	Elias II ibn Muqlī (d. 1131)	*K. Uṣūl al-dīn*	Ar.	Nestorian	—[199]
12.	Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171)	*K. da-Mmallūṯ ʾalāhūṯā w-meṯbarnāšūṯā w-ʿal kyānē meṯyaḏʿānē w-meṯraḡšānē*	Syr.	Jacobite	—[200]
13.	Solomon of Baṣra	*K. d-Debbōrīṯā*	Syr.	Nestorian	
14.	Jacob bar Shakkō (d. 1241)	*K. d-Sīmāṯā*	Syr.	Jacobite	1231[201]
15.	al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. between 1270 and 1280)	*Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn wa-masmūʿ maḥṣūl al-yaqīn*	Ar.	Copt	—[202]
16.	Idem	*Maqāla mukhtaṣara fī uṣūl al-dīn*	Ar.	Copt	1260[203]
17.	Gregory Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)	*Mnāraṯ quḏšē*	Syr.	Jacobite	ca. 1266/7[204]
18.	Idem	*K. d-Zalgē*	Syr.	Jacobite	—[205]
19.	Abū Shākir ibn al-Rāhib (d. ca. 1290)	*K. al-Burhān fī al-qawānīn al-mukmala wa-l-farāʾiḍ al-muhmala*	Ar.	Copt	1270[206]

[197] Herman G.B. Teule and Mark N. Swanson, 'Yaḥyā ibn Jarīr', *CMR* 3 (2011): 280–286, here 282–286.

[198] Gerrit J. Reinink, 'Communal Identity and the Systematisation of Knowledge in the Syriac "Cause of all Causes",' in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 275–288.

[199] Herman G.B. Teule, 'Elias II, Ibn al-Muqlī', *CMR* 3 (2011): 418–421, here, 419–421.

[200] See Gabriel Rabo, *Dionysius Jakob Ṣalibi: syrischer Kommentar zum Römerbrief* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2019), 39.

[201] Herman G.B. Teule, 'Jacob bar Shakkō', *CMR* 4 (2012): 240–244, here 242–244.

[202] Wadi Awad, 'Al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl', *CMR* 4 (2012): 530–537, here 533–537.

[203] Awad, 'Al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl', 532–533.

[204] Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 65.

[205] Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography*, 65.

[206] Adel Sidarus, 'Ibn al-Rāhib', *CMR* 4 (2012): 471–479, here 477–479.

20.	ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā (d. 1318)	*K. d-Margānīṯā d-ʿal šrārā da-ḵrestyānūṯā*	Syr.	Nestorian	1298[207]
21.	Idem	*al-Durra al-muthammana al-rūḥāniyya fī uṣūl al-dīn*	Ar.	Nestorian	1301/2[208]
22.	Idem	*Farāʾid al-fawāʾid fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-l-ʿaqāʾid*	Ar.	Nestorian	1312/13[209]
23.	Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā (d. late fourteenth CE.)	*Asfār al-asrār*	Ar.	Nestorian	1332[210]
24.	al-Shams ibn Kabar (d. 1324)	*Miṣbāḥ al-ẓulma wa-īḍāḥ al-khidma*	Ar.	Copt	—[211]
25.	Daniel al-Suryānī al-Mardīnī (after 1382)	*K. Uṣūl al-dīn wa-shifāʾ qulūb al-muʾminīn*	Ar.	Jacobite	—[212]

Thus, given the widespread distribution of the genre over many centuries, it is clear that ʿAbdīshōʿ, who produced no less than three such texts, was working within a well-established paradigm of theological exposition. As Table 1.3 shows, he was by no means the first to do so from within the East Syrian tradition. Perhaps the most extensive summation of church dogma produced by a pre-modern East Syrian is ʿAmr ibn Mattā's *Kitāb al-Majdal* (no. 5 in Table 1.3), which epitomizes branches of ecclesiastical knowledge as diverse as church history, canon law, and systematic theology.[213] A related genre is the theological encyclopaedia or anthology, which we have already encountered in the form of Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā's *Asfār al-asrār* (no. 23 in Table 1.3), a work comprising material by Ṣalībā himself together with lengthy extracts from other sources. Also noteworthy is the *Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn* of the Copto-Arabic writer al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (no. 15 in Table 1.3), which similarly combines material by al-Muʾtaman himself and extracts from patristic and later authorities, including writings by his brothers, al-Ṣafī and al-Asʿad.[214] In the Syriac domain, Solomon of Baṣra (d. 1222), in his *Book of the Bee* (no. 13 in Table 1.3), aspires to a similar degree of comprehensiveness, weaving his own words with quotations from earlier authorities. Like John of Damascus before him, Solomon compares himself to a

[207] See above, Section 1.3.1. [208] See above, Section 1.3.3. [209] See above, Section 1.3.4.
[210] Mark N. Swanson, 'Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā', *CMR* 4 (2012): 900–905, here 901–905.
[211] Wadi Awad, 'Al-Shams ibn Kabar', *CMR* 4 (2012): 762–766.
[212] Mark N. Swanson, 'Dāniyāl al-Suryānī al-Mardīnī', *CMR* 5 (2013): 194–198.
[213] For a summary of contents, see Swanson, '*Kitāb al-majdal*', *CMR* 2 (2010): 630.
[214] On the religious encyclopaedism of this text and others like from the Copto-Arabic tradition, see Adel Sidarus, 'Encyclopédisme et savoir religieux à l'âge d'or de la littérature copto-arabe (XIIIe–XIVe siècle)', *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 74 (2008) 347–361.

bee (hence the title of his book), having 'gathered (*laqqeṭnan*) the blossoms of the two Testaments and the flowers of the holy Books, and placed them therein for your benefit'.[215] A similar language of compilation and synthesis occurs in John bar Zōʿbī's *Well-Woven Fabric* (*Zqōrā mlaḥmā*). Though mainly concerned with Christology than with all branches of ecclesiastical knowledge, the title of this work is evocative of a textured and systematically layered approach to theological exposition.[216] In like fashion, ʿAbdīshōʿ's intention was to provide useful summations of church dogma, as he explicitly states in his prefaces to his *Pearl* and *Durra* (observed above).

This need not mean, however, that such works should be dismissed as mere compilation. Once again, recent approaches from adjacent fields can help elucidate the function and importance of such texts. In his study on Mamluk encyclopaedism, Elias Muhanna demonstrates that Arabic literary anthologies, while long overlooked in modern scholarship due to their perceived unoriginality, were in fact rich sites of intellectual activity and didacticism that provide insights into the reception of older compositions and the formation of literary canons, and therefore deserve to be seen as more than mere repositories of earlier texts.[217] While the genre of Christian Arabic and Syriac *summae* treat only the religious sciences, the same might be said of their function and broader significance. As we shall see throughout this study, ʿAbdīshōʿ's theological compendia preserve vast amounts of earlier materials that would become central to the Church of the East's theological canon. In the realm of the Islamic religious sciences, we might also mention the *Uṣūl al-dīn* ('Foundations of the Religion') genre of *kalām*, that is, systematic or dialectical theology. Islamic theology as a discipline initially emerged in the first three Islamic centuries in response to non-Muslim challenges and, later, challenges from within the early Muslim community.[218] The earliest *kalām* texts tended to be on single subjects, most notably predestination (*qadar*). Yet by the eleventh century, Muslim *mutakallimūn* produced vast compendia of dogma

[215] Solomon of Basra, *The Book of the Bee*, ed. Ernest A. Wallis Budge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 4 (text), 2 (trans.). Cf. John of Damascus, *The Fount of Knowledge*, in Fredric H. Chase, *Saint John of Damascus: Writings* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 5: 'In imitation of the method of the bee, I shall make my composition from those things which are conformable with the truth and from our enemies themselves gather the fruit of salvation.'

[216] On this method, see Farina Margherita. 'Bar Zoʿbi's Grammar and the Syriac "Texture of Knowledge" in the 13th Century', in *Christianity, Islam, and the Syriac Renaissance: The Impact of ʿAbdīshōʿ Bar Brīkhā. Papers Collected on His 700th Anniversary*, edited by Salam Rassi and Željko Paša. Orientalia Christiana Analecta, forthcoming.

[217] Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book: al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), ch. 1.

[218] On the origins of Islamic *kalām* as arising from internal debates among Muslims, particularly among the Muʿtazila, see Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, tr. John O'Kane, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1:15–20 and 53–65. For a summary of studies that situate early Islamic dogmatic theology in debates with non-Muslims as well as Muslims, see Alexander Treiger, 'The Origins of *Kalām*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27–43.

that clarified a given *madhhab*'s position on a comprehensive range of topics, from the nature of God's existence to the fate of the soul after death.[219] Perhaps influenced by *kalām* works and handbooks of Islamic jurisprudence, the Muslim philosopher Avicenna pioneered the genre of the Arabic philosophical compendium. Following his death in 1037, the post-Avicennan *summa* would become one of the main sites of philosophical exposition in the Islamicate world for centuries to come.[220] An examination of similar activities involving the systematic ordering of theological knowledge among Christian thinkers will surely help us achieve a better-rounded picture of the intellectual history of the medieval Islamicate world.

The first step towards understanding ʿAbdīshōʿ's 'thoughtworld' involves attending to the various influences, Christian and non-Christian, that underlie his many apologetic works. In her study on Maimonides, Sarah Stroumsa highlights the benefits of identifying the component parts of a given system of thought, so 'critical in our attempt to gauge the depth of a thinker's attachment to his milieu'.[221] Likewise, identifying the compositional layers of ʿAbdīshōʿ's works will reveal the very tradition that he sought to establish as authoritative and the environment in which he did it. But in doing so, we need not think of ʿAbdīshōʿ's mediation of this tradition as a slavish cobbling together of sources. Although it is important to identify these sources (many of which he rarely names), we must also understand *how* ʿAbdīshōʿ mediates and systematizes his Church's literary heritage in ways that contributed to the consolidation of an established theological canon. We see evidence of an active rather than passive mediation in other works of his such as the *Catalogue*. Long considered a mere repository of literary-historical data, few scholars have appreciated the *Catalogue* as a selective reconstruction of the Church of the East's literary heritage. For example, we know that ʿAbdīshōʿ was aware of the great Nestorian philosopher, exegete, and canonist Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), whom, as we observed above, he refers to in his *Rhymed Gospels* as 'chief of the moderns' (*raʾīs al-mutaʾakhkhirīn*). Yet nowhere does Ibn al-Ṭayyib occur in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue*. Similarly, while ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, a Nestorian, has been vaunted in past scholarship as foundational to the Christian Arabic tradition,[222] he is nowhere to be found in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue*. This indicates, first, that what might appear to us as an established canon was not the case seven hundred years ago. Second, this apparent dissonance should prompt us to take a constructivist approach to ʿAbdīshōʿ's theological oeuvre. This is to say, we must view his epitomization as

[219] For these types of *summae*, see Sabine Schmidtke, 'The Muʿtazilite Movement (III): The Scholastic Phase', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. idem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 159–180 and Heidrun Eichner, 'Handbooks in the Tradition of Later Eastern Ashʿarism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 494–514.

[220] See Eichner, 'The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition'.

[221] Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, xiii.

[222] As discussed above, in Section 1.4.

a conscious and subjective process of religious 'development' as well as one of 'tradition'.[223] Thus, to meaningfully approach ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics, we must consider the materials he excludes as well as those he includes.

As to the interreligious dimension of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology, the genre of Syriac and Christian Arabic dogmatics had already developed along strongly apologetic lines by the thirteenth century. We have noted the apologetic dimension of the earliest surviving *summa theologiae arabica* known as the *Jāmiʿ fī wujūh al-īmān*. It is no coincidence that the genre first emerges in the Islamic period (though the connected genre of the Christian florilegia appears much earlier).[224] Indeed, the majority of *summae* enumerated in Table 1.3 were written in Arabic, the language of the Qurʾān that was used and spoken by several Christian communities where Muslims ruled, which in ʿAbdīshōʿ's case was the northern Mesopotamian region of the Jazīra (of which more will be said in Chapter 2). Although the first known example of the *summa* genre—John of Damascus's *De Fide Orthodoxa*—was written in Greek, its composition nevertheless reflects an environment of heightened theological tensions. Following the seventh-century Arab conquests, shifting perceptions of political and religious authority led church elites to formulate new theological strategies, in an environment where Christians no longer governed (in the case of the former Byzantine Empire)[225] or were they had long maintained a significant presence (in the case of the former Sasanian Empire in Iraq).[226] For John of Damascus living in the former Byzantine territories of Syria and Palestine, this involved producing a clear and comprehensive summation of what exactly constituted such notions as orthodoxy, patristic authority, and ecclesiastical leadership. As Vassa Kontouma has observed in John's system of dogmatics:

> [At] a time when oriental Christianity suffered grave reversals, persecutions and numerous conversions to Islam, at a time when the very survival of the patriarchate of Jerusalem, severed from Byzantium, was problematical, it was essential

[223] Such an approach has been fruitfully applied to the history of early Christianity; see, for example, Anders K. Petersen, '"Invention" and "Maintenance" of Religious Traditions: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives', in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity*, ed, Jörg Ulrich (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 129–160.

[224] An early expression of this genre appears in Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), in Chapter 29 of his *De Spiritu Sanctu*; Alexakis, 'Byzantine Florilegia', 28.

[225] For the ideological reorientation around the doctrines and rites of the Chalcedonian Church as a response to the losses of the Byzantine Empire and the imposition of monothelete and monoenergist doctrines from Constantinople, see David M. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1994), 99–115; Phil Booth, 'Sophronius of Jerusalem and the End of Roman History', in *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, ed. Philip Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–28.

[226] On the Christian makeup of Sasanian Mesopotamia on the eve of Islam, see Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 332–346.

> to synthesise and record the contents of the faith. It was also important to make it clearly accessible to a large number.[227]

Suffice it to say, Christians living under Islamic rule in subsequent centuries did not live in a perpetual state of persecution. Nor could all Christian groups in the medieval Islamicate world claim to have once been a ruling church prior to the advent of Islam. This was certainly the case for the Church of the East, which for the most part prior to the Islamic conquests had lived under Zoroastrian rule.[228] Nevertheless, as Christians of all confessions slowly found themselves in the position of socio-political—if not numerical—minorities, the need to clarify and defend internal dogmas and authorities became ever-present. Historians have tended to view the process of conversion to Islam as gradual, with scholars such as Tamer El-Laithy and Yossef Rapoport arguing that large swathes of the Egyptian countryside remained Christian well into the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods.[229] As for Syria and Mesopotamia, the contours of conversion are far harder to trace, but nor is the rate of conversion likely to have been particularly rapid in the periods between the seventh-century Arab conquests and the fourteenth century.[230] At any rate, the production of Christian *summae* in these centuries occurs in both the regions of Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, as can be seen from Table 1.3. As such, the development of the theological epitome is a phenomenon that can be observed in the *longue durée*. One way of understanding the widespread and multi-confessional distribution of the genre is to view it as a means by which Christian writers maintained theological boundaries vis-à-vis Muslims and other Christians. Through didactic processes of compilation and synthesis, ecclesiastical elites sought to uphold a stable and circumscribed body of dogma for Christians living in an increasingly non-

[227] Vassa Kontouma, 'The Fount of Knowledge between Conservation and Creation', in *John of Damascus: New Studies on his Life and Works* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2015), V, here 14.

[228] The majority of the synods of the Church of the East—from the Synod of Isaac in 410 to the Assembly of Ctesiphon in 612—were held under the auspices of Zoroastrian Sasanian kings and in many cases were authorized by them; see Sebastian P. Brock, 'The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials', in *Aksum, Thyateira: A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios of Thyateira and Great Britain*, ed. George D. Dragas (London: Thyateira House, 1985), 39–142; reprinted in *Studies in Syriac Literature: History, Literature and Theology* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992), XII; idem, 'The Church of the East in the Sassanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and its Absence from the Councils of the Roman Empire', in *Syriac Dialogue: First Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 1994), 69–87.

[229] Tamer El-Leithy, 'Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293–1524 A.D', (PhD. diss., Princeton University, 2005), 21–22, 25–28; Yossef Rapoport, *Rural Economy and Tribal Society in Islamic Egypt: A Study of al-Nabulusi's* Villages of the Fayyum (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 206–229.

[230] For an excellent conspectus and appraisal of previous literature on conversion in the medieval Islamic Middle East, see Thomas Carlson, 'Contours of Conversion: The Geography of Islamisation in Syria, 600–1500', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 4 (2015): 791–816. See also Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 340–348.

Christian environment—and thus, such texts functioned as much as catechisms as they did anti-Muslim apologetics. Rather than seeing ʿAbdīshōʿ as slavishly reproducing past authorities in order to maintain this canon, this study will consider his apologetics as a re-articulation of established authority, in terms that generated new meaning for Christians living in an Islamicate environment.

Of course, systematic dogmatics were not the only means through which Christians expressed ideas of religious belonging. It goes without saying that not all Christians were theologically literate, and therefore dense collections of dogma could only expect a limited reception outside clerical circles. Focusing mainly on the opening Islamic centuries, Jack Tannous has posited the existence of a stratum of Christians he identifies as 'simple believers', who were less aware of the complex Christological debates of their more educated religious leaders.[231] Placing Syriac Christian perspectives at the centre of his study, Tannous contends that this unlettered layer of society would become the first generation of converts to Islam.[232] Tannous does, however, allow that the category of 'simple belief' is a transhistorical one that applies to other periods of religious encounter.[233] Indeed, one finds plenty of evidence of simple believers in the later Middle Ages: unlettered Christians who found symbols of belonging in cultic practices such as baptism and the commemoration of saints rather than complex arguments about Christ's natures.[234] However, we should not rush to the judgement that ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics were merely concerned with an opaque theological reasoning that had little bearing on reality. As Tannous also points out, just as there was a layering of society, so was there a layering of knowledge.[235] As will become clearer in this study, although ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology contains a strong philosophical dimension, it nevertheless aspires to clarity and accessibility. This is not to say that ʿAbdīshōʿ's arguments were intended for the 'simple', but that he expresses them in a concise manner and makes frequent appeals to common sense, often through didactic parables and analogies.[236] In short, his aim is to elucidate

[231] Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 46–81, where he gives a useful delineation of 'simple' and 'learned' belief.

[232] Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 353–399.

[233] For example, Tannous (*The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 518–519) compares the situation of unlettered Christians in the late seventh century to early modern European reports about Christians on the Red Sea island of Socotra. Although these reports present problems of bias and interpretation, they nevertheless 'highlight the fact that lay Christian communities in rural and remote places (or in the case of Socotra, far from what may be termed the Christian metropole), lacked access to the doctrinal and catechetical resources that were available in major centers of Christianity'.

[234] Some cultic symbols could even have meaning beyond Christian boundaries; for reports of Muslim baptism in the twelth century, for example, see David G.K. Taylor, 'The Syriac Baptism of St John: A Christian Ritual of Protection for Muslim Children', in *The Late Antique World of Early Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean*, ed. Robert G. Hoyland (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2015), 437–459.

[235] Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 57ff.

[236] Thomas Carlson (*Christianity in Fifteenth-Century Iraq*, 115–116) observes a similar function in the theology of Isaac Shbadnāyā.

complex theological problems for a book-reading—but not exclusively *theologically* literate—audience.

As to these texts' broader social background, systematic theology attended not only to the consubstantiality of the Trinitarian persons or the issue of free will; it could also address key concerns about conversion and apostasy. We have already observed such concerns in the *Jāmiʿ fī al-wujūh al-īmān*, while *summae* like the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, for example, treat relatively quotidian matters such as the use of candles in worship in addition to more complex subjects.[237] We should also bear in mind that systematic expositions of Christian theology could often reflect 'real world' events, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As mentioned above, such texts rarely mention contemporary events, but that did not mean that they were entirely divorced from everyday realities. In 1260, Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl composed his *Maqāla mukhtaṣara fī uṣūl al-dīn* with the stated intention of instructing young Christian boys (*ṣibyān awlād al-muʾminīn*) who were being challenged by Muslims (*khārijīn ʿan hādhā al-madhhab*) about the fundaments of their faith.[238] In 1383, the Syrian Orthodox Daniel ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was incarcerated, tortured, and later ransomed in Mardin after a copy of his *Uṣūl al-dīn* fell into the hands of a Muslim jurist.[239] As we shall see in the following chapter, ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote his entire apologetic corpus at a time when Christian morale in the Mongol Ilkhanate was at a low.

Thus, we should not reduce systematic dogmatics, and apologetics more generally, to mere theological hair-splitting. Rather, we should appreciate their role in sustaining notions of Christian belonging in the Islamicate world over several centuries. Mohamed Talbi has argued that it was this intellectual enterprise that ensured the continued vitality of Christian communities in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, in contrast to their decline and eventual disappearance in North Africa, where there is no evidence of a continuous tradition of an apologetic and systematic theology among the region's Christians.[240] While there were doubtless other reasons for Christianity's collapse in North Africa, Talbi nevertheless highlights the important role that such works had in upholding a distinctly Christian identity in an increasingly non-Christian setting—a theme that Thomas Burman revisited

[237] ʿAmr ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-Majdal li-l-istibṣār wa-l-jadal*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France 190 ar. 190, 992r–1005v. This topic is dealt with alongside the fastening of the prayer girdle (*mūjib shadd al-awsāṭ bi-l-zunnār wa-ilhāb al-qanādīl wa-l-bakhūr*).

[238] The preface to this work is edited and translated in Samir Khalil Samir, 'Date de composition de la Somme Théologique d'al Muʾtaman b. al-ʿAssāl', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 50, no. 1 (1984): 94–106, here § 6–7.

[239] We learn of this incident from Daniel's own testimony, in an autobiographical note discussed by François Nau, 'Rabban Daniel de Mardin, auteur syro-arabe du XIV^{e} siècle', *Revue du orient chrétien* 10 (1905): 314–318.

[240] Mohamed Talbi, 'Le Christianisme maghrébin de la conquête musulmane à sa disparition: une tentative d'explication', in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 313–351, esp. 330–331.

in his study of Mozarabic polemics and apologetics in Islamic Spain.[241] Indeed, apologetics were certainly recognized by ʿAbdīshōʿ as an important component of his own Church's literary identity, for he includes in his *Catalogue* the Christian–Muslim disputations of the Monk of Bēṯ Ḥālē (ca. eighth century), Timothy I (782/3), Elias of Nisibis (1027); the above-mentioned *Apology of al-Kindī* (ca. tenth century); and what appears to be a lost refutation (*šrāyā*) of the Qurʾān by one Abū Nūḥ.[242]

Mention should also be made of the *adversus judaeos* literature in which Jews are the subject of Christian polemics and apologetics. The genre has its roots in patristic literature and was once thought to have declined in the medieval period when Muslims, being socially dominant, posed the greater threat to Christianity.[243] More recent research, however, has revealed that *adversus judaeos* literature continued well into the Islamic Middle Ages.[244] Such texts often reflect the Islamicate environment in which they were written, revealing an entangled history of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim disputation. In the East Syrian milieu, for example, we encounter this feature in a Christian Arabic *majlis* text, set in the city of Merv, between a monk named Shubḥalīshōʿ and the exilarch of the Jews (*raʾs al-jālūt*), the earliest known manuscript of which was copied in Cyprus in 1335 by Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā.[245] The disputation is also said to have taken place before an assembly of Muslims (*jamāʿa min al-muslimīn*) whose role it was to adjudicate the disputation, the implication being that it is the Muslims as well as the Jew who needed to be convinced.[246] At any rate, though Jews are occasionally mentioned or alluded to in ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology, it is ultimately Islam that dominates his apologetic concerns.

By ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, Syriac and Arabic apologetics were mainly intended for Christians by Christians but were also written with a Muslim interlocutor in mind. The same may be said of earlier periods of Christian literature in the Islamicate world. In the case of Theodore Abū Qurra, for example, Mark Swanson observes that 'he writes for a Christian audience—but always seems to imagine Muslims

[241] Thomas E. Burman, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050–1200* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 94–124.

[242] *Catalogue*, 88 (text), 194 (trans.) (Timothy I); 110 (text), 214 (trans.) (the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē); 111 (text), 215 (trans.) (Abū Nūḥ and *The Apology of al-Kindī*); 125 (text), 227 (trans.) (Elias of Nisibis).

[243] Simone Rosenkranz, *Die jüdisch-christliche Auseinandersetzung unter islamischer Herrschaft: 7.-10. Jahrhundert* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004). See also Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935).

[244] Barbara Roggema, 'Polemics between Religious Minorities: Christian *Adversus Judaeos* from the Early Abbasid Period', in *Minorities in Contact in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Clara Almagro Vidal et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 119–133.

[245] Anonymous, *Mujādalat jarat bayna Shuwḥālīshūʿ al-rāhib wa-bayna raʾs al-jālūt raʾīs al-yahūd fī amr sayyidinā al-Masīḥ* Bibliothèque nationale de France, ar. 204, 1v–38r. The subject of the disputation is the advent of Christ (*majīʾ al-masīḥ*), for and against which the disputants debate various Biblical proof-texts.

[246] Anonymous, *Mujādala*, 1v.

reading over their shoulders or listening in the background'.[247] Much of the catechetical enterprise of churches under Muslim rule sought to present Christian dogmas in ways that (at least in theory) appeared palatable to a hypothetical Muslim. In doing so, the aim was not simply to appropriate Muslim arguments to vindicate Christian doctrine. Rather, it was to show that Christian belief could be defended on its own terms. Since Christian apologists sought to affirm the foundations of their faith to an internal audience, it was crucial that Christian arguments rested on Christian authorities as well as Muslim proof-texts. As Andreas Juckel has argued, the Greek and Syriac Church Fathers provided authors of the so-called Syriac Renaissance a frame of reference that was culturally autonomous from the intellectual world of Islam, despite their attempts elsewhere to build common ground.[248] A similar observation has been made about Barhebraeus, who despite his openness to Islamic philosophy and aspects of *kalām*, was far likelier to openly acknowledge indebtedness to the Church Fathers, especially in his dogmatic works.[249] This valorization of a patristic past is likewise discoverable in ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics: as he suggests in the preface to his *Durra*, only the words of the 'blessed Fathers' (*al-ābāʾ al-suʿadāʾ*) can dispel doubts about Christianity through sound demonstration (*bi-l-burḥān al-ṣaḥīḥ*).[250]

But who precisely were these 'blessed Fathers' in ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme? And what exactly constituted the theological tradition that he sought to affirm? To be sure, such authorities included Greek and Syrian patristic writers who had been read and taught in East Syrian circles for centuries prior to ʿAbdīshōʿ's time.[251] As we shall see in Chapter 4, the teachings of the 'Greek Doctors' of the Church of the East, namely Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) and Nestorius of Constantinople (d. ca. 450), loom especially large in ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology. However, these authorities also included more recent figures who wrote in Arabic such as Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046), Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn—and even Jacobite writers such as Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), Abū ʿAlī ʿĪsā ibn Zurʿa (d. 1008), and Abū Naṣr Yaḥyā ibn Jarīr (d. 1103/4). With the exception

[247] Mark N. Swanson, 'Apologetics, Catechesis, and the Question of Audience in "On the Triune Nature of God" (Sinai Arabic 154) and Three Treatises of Theadore Abū Qurrah', in *Christian and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 113–134, here 123.

[248] Andreas Juckel, 'La réception des Pères grecs pendant la «Renaissance» syriaque: renaissance – inculturation – identité', in *Les Pères grecs dans la tradition syriaque*, ed. Andrea Schmidt and Dominique Gonnet (Paris: Geuthner, 2007), 89–125, here 108–113. For the frequency of citations from the Greek fathers in the third 'base' of Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*, see ibid., 117–120.

[249] David G.K. Taylor, 'L'importance des Pères de l'Eglise dans l'oeuvre spéculative de Barhebraeus', *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 63–83, here 78–83.

[250] *Durra*, ch. 0, §§ 21–30: 'the blessed Fathers (*al-ābāʾ al-suʿadāʾ*) have spoken about all this and clarified it with the aid of our lord Christ and have written on matters that cure hearts and dispel doubts with sound demonstration'.

[251] Sebastian Brock, 'Greek, Syriac translations from', *GEDSH*, 180–181.

of Elias of Nisibis, Ibn Jarīr, and Bar Malkōn, these Arabic authorities were among the most important Christian representatives of the Baghdad school of Aristotelian philosophy, from which much of the scholastic dimension of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology derives. That ʿAbdīshōʿ considers such medieval writers among the 'Fathers' of the Church suggests that by the thirteenth century, the Church of the East's theological heritage was not restricted to patristic and late antique writers. Instead, it included those medieval thinkers whose theology was forged in a largely Arabic-reading, Islamicate environment. This was most certainly the case in other, near contemporary theological works, as we have already observed in Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā's *Asfār al-asrār*.[252] Other examples in which late antique patristic sources are placed alongside medieval Christian Arabic ones include the *summae* of the Copto-Arabic writers al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl and Abū Shākir ibn al-Rāhib.[253] In fact, it is largely thanks to the encyclopaedic activities of later medieval Coptic writers that the theological works of important figures like Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī have come down to us.[254] As we shall see throughout this study, ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of Arabic authorities also extends to non-East Syrian writers, particularly those of the Miaphysite tradition such as the Baghdad Aristotelians Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Ibn Zurʿa. Such inclusiveness suggests that such foundational Abbasid-era authorities were considered common property among Christian theologians in the thirteenth century, especially those writing in Arabic. The religious patrimony that ʿAbdīshōʿ sought to mediate was, therefore, not a single cloth but a rich tapestry of late antique and medieval sources.

1.8 The Structure and Content of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Apologetics

So much for the genre and texture of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic theology. As to its structure and content, ʿAbdīshōʿ's ordering of subjects tends to follow a twofold scheme, which is important to understand when establishing the foci of this study. The first part of this scheme sets out topics relating to God's absolute unity and attributes, culminating in discussions of the Trinity and Incarnation. Having established these, ʿAbdīshōʿ then turns to matters of cult such as the veneration of the Cross, Baptism, and the Sacraments. This twofold division is significant because, as has already been pointed out, the purpose of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics was not only to defend Christianity against Muslim attacks but also to inculcate

[252] See Introduction.

[253] On the plethora of Christian sources employed by Ibn al-ʿAssāl's sources, see Samir, 'Date de composition de la Somme Théologique d'al-Muʾtaman, 94–106 and Adel Sidarus, 'Les sources d'une somme philosophico-théologique copte arabe (*Kitâb al-burhân* d'Abû Šâkir ibn al-Râhib, xiiie siècle)', *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* 17 (2010): 127–163.

[254] For the Copto-Arabic florilegia and *summae* that contain his work, see Emilio Platti, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe: sa théologie de l'Incarnation* (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1983), 33–53.

the basic tenets of Christian belief to an internal audience. To do so, it was necessary to provide a concise and comprehensive answer to a foundational question: what is Christianity? For Syriac writers such as Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), Christianity was the sum of faith (*haymānūṯā*) and action (*sāʿōrūṯā*).[255] One finds a similar division in Syriac understandings of belief. While the Greek loanword *tēʾōlōgīya* and its Syriac calque *mmallūṯ ʾalāhūṯā* often carried the meaning of divine speech,[256] it could also denote any discourse relating to God, His attributes, and providence. In this context, Syriac authors often understood theology to constitute the former half of a twofold scheme: theory and practice. In the preamble to his commentary on the Gospels, the West Syrian Bishop of Āmid Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171) writes that the 'Book of Christ' consists of two parts. The first is 'theory', (*tēʾōrīya*) which is also called 'theology' (*mmallūṯ ʾalāhūṯā*) and attends to discussions about God, while the second is action (*sāʿōrūṯā*), which he defines as man's 'holy conduct' (*dubbārē qaddīšē*).[257] This theory–praxis division owes something to ancient Greek philosophical discourses and was later taken up by patristic authors.[258]

In Christian Arabic dogmatics one also encounters a twofold division between what Sydney Griffiths has identified as 'primary' and 'secondary' topics, the former pertaining to God and the latter to acts of worship.[259] An explicit articulation of this scheme comes from a treatise by the physician Abū Sahl ʿĪsā ibn Yaḥyā al-Jurjānī (d. after 1010), a teacher of Avicenna and a Christian. Although

[255] See brief treatise by Jacob of Edessa Jacob of Edessa, *Mēmrā d-maḵsānūṯā d-luqbal (ʾ)nāšīn marrāḥē w-ʿāḇray ʿal nāmōsē d-ʾAlāhā w-ḏāyšīn l-qānōnē ʿedtānāyē*, in Michael Penn, 'Jacob of Edessa's *Defining Christianity*: Introduction, Edition, and Translation', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 64, no. 3–4 (2012): 175–199, here 191 (text), 198 (trans).

[256] See, for example, Daniel of Ṣalaḥ's (d. between 510 and 559) introduction to his Psalm commentary, where the Psalms are said to concern ten subjects, the first being *mmallūṯ ʾalāhūṯā*, which pertains to God's speech in Ps. 33:6 and 110:1; Daniel of Ṣalaḥ, *Eine jakobitische Einleitung in den Psalter in Verbindung mit zwei Homilien aus dem grossen Psalmenkommentar des Daniel von Salah*, ed. and tr. Gustav Dietrich (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1901), 9 (text), 8 (trans.). For uses of the term *tēʾōlōgīya* as divine speech, see letter on the Magi by Jacob of Edessa, *E Jacobi Edesseni Epistula de regibus magis*, in Eberhard Nestle, *Brevis linguae Syriacae grammatica, litteratura, chrestomathia, cum glossario* (Leipzig: H. Reuther, 1881), 82, and the eleventh-century *Causa Causarum*'s statement about the Seraphim being illumined by theology; anonymous, *Das Buch von der Erkenntniss der Wahrheit oder der Ursache aller Ursachen*, ed. and tr. Carl Kayser, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1883–1889), 116 (text), 149 (trans.).

[257] Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *Dionysii bar Ṣalībī Commentarii in Evangelia*, ed. Jaroslav Sedaček and Jean Baptiste Chabot, CSCO 113–114 (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1906), 24 (text), 20 (trans.). See also Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*, the third book of which deals with God's existence, attributes, and triune nature and is entitled *Mmallūṯ ʾalāhūṯā ʾawkēṯ tēʾōlōgīya*; Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre du sanctuaire de Grégoire Abou'lfaradj dit Barhebraeus: Troisième base: de la Theologie*, ed. and tr. François Graffin, Patrologia Orientalis 27, fasc. 3 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1957), 468 (text), 469 (trans.).

[258] See Carlos Fraenkel, 'Integrating Greek Philosophy into Jewish and Christian Contexts in Antiquity: The Alexandrian Project', in *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, ed. Robert Wisnovsky et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 23–47, here 44.

[259] Sydney H. Griffith, 'Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion', in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1–43, here 3–4.

al-Jurjānī does not explicitly mention Christian doctrines, he states that religion (*al-dīn*) comprises two parts. The first is 'faith' (*īmān*) and the second is 'devotional action' (*al-aʿmāl al-ʿibādātiyya*). The former—faith—is in turn comprised of two things. The first is assenting (*taṣdīq*) to all that is known of God's essence and attributes, which amount to knowledge of divine things (*al-ʿulūm al-ilāhiyya*, lit. 'divine sciences'). The second, meanwhile, is professing (*iqrār*) all that God has revealed through his prophets and saints. The implication here is that the Christian must believe with both a firm mind and sincere words. Action, on the other hand, is said by al-Jurjānī to be that which brings us closer to God and causes us to resemble His angels.[260] The terms employed here bear some affinity to those used by Muslim scholars in their delineations of belief and worship, though their meanings differed considerably throughout various schools and periods. Nevertheless, like their Christian counterparts, Muslim theologians and jurists sought to answer the question: what is religion (*mā huwa al-dīn*)? A classic division one typically finds in Ḥanbalī and Muʿtazilī discourse, for example, is that the totality of religion (*al-dīn*) comprises 'belief' (*īmān*) and 'action' (*ʿamāl*). The two major components of *īmān* are assent with the heart (*taṣdīq bi-l-qalb*) and professing with the tongue (*iqrār bi-l-lisān*).[261]

Writing as they did within a shared literary and conceptual space, it was common for Christian Arabic authors to seize on a common vocabulary to express their own conceptions of religion. Thus, Christian theologians in the thirteenth century continued to make use of such terms, imbuing them with meaning that was unmistakably Christian. In al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl's elaboration of al-Jurjānī's aforementioned definition of Christianity, he affirms an explicitly Christian understanding of the terms *īmān, taṣdīq*, and *iqrār*. 'Faith', he writes, 'is assenting and professing in heart and word (*bi-l-qalb wa-bi-l-lisān*), as the apostle Paul said' (cf. Rom 101:1–10). Regarding al-Jurjānī's statement about assenting (*taṣdīq*) to what is known of God's essence and attributes, Ibn al-ʿAssāl explains that this entails belief in (i) God's unicity (*tawḥīd*) and threeness (*tathlīth*), and the existence of three essential attributes in God's eternal essence known as properties (*khawāṣṣ*) and hypostases (*aqānīm*);[262] (ii) that each of these hypostases are consubstantial; (iii) and that there was a uniting (*ittiḥād*) of divine and human natures in Christ.[263] In other words, these are the core tenets through

[260] 'Īsā ibn Yaḥyā al-Jurjānī, *Aqsām al-dīn*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 13, §§ 3–5.

[261] See Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of* īmān *and* islām (Kuala Lampur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006), 92–102; Cornelia Schöck, 'Belief and Unbelief in Classical Sunnī Theology', *EI*[3] 2 (2010): 101–111. Note that in the Islamic context, I opt for the translation of *īmān* as 'belief' rather than 'faith' due to the latter's Christian connotations which, while apt in some instances, does not adequately convey all the different Muslim conceptions of the word. On this issue, see Richard M. Frank, 'Knowledge and Taqlîd: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ashʿarism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 1 (1989): 37–62, here 38, n. 3.

[262] See Chapter 3 for a detailed study of these Trinitarian terms.

[263] Jurjānī, *Aqsām al-dīn*, § 40–49.

which Christian faith is defined. As to religiously inspired conduct, Ibn al-ʿAssāl states that actions (*aʿmāl*) are extrinsic to faith but nevertheless the means through which faith is sustained, since the mind, body, and soul participate in each. According to Ibn al-ʿAssāl, these actions include fasting, prayer, almsgiving, voluntary forbearance (*al-ṣabr al-ikhtiyārī*), and the Eucharist.[264]

A similar definition of Christianity informs the structure of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics. Recalling Bar Ṣalībī's division of religion into theory and practice mentioned above, and making use of the language of belief in Arabic theological discourse, our author sets out the fundamental structure of Christianity and hence his *Durra*:

> Christianity is professing (*iqrār*) the oneness of the Creator's essence and the threeness (*tathlīth*) of the attributes proper to Him; faith (*imān*) in Christ according to explanations that prove him [to be Christ]; recognition (*iʿtimād*) of the exalted name, holy attributes, virtues, and obligations; and holding to be true (*taṣdīq*) the resurrection of the dead and punishment of disobedience [in the hereafter]. These are the religious foundations (*uṣūl al-dīniyya*) of the Christian law (*sharīʿat al-naṣrāniyya*).[265] *They are divided into two parts, some theoretical* (ʿilmiyya), *which are seven, some practical* (ʿamaliyya), *which are [also] seven.*[266] (Emphasis mine.)

It is clear, therefore, that the structure of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics is based on a common understanding that Christianity was comprised of two principal parts: faith and action—or in the case of the above, theory and praxis. The core components of the former deal with matters concerning God's Trinity and Incarnation and are therefore theological *sensu stricto*. Given the centrality of these two doctrines—the Trinity and Incarnation—in articulations of Christian faith, I have chosen them as my foci in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. As I will show further on in this study, these primary topics lay at the heart of Christian claims to monotheism against persistent Muslim—and to a lesser extent—Jewish accusations of polytheism.[267] The problematic nature of the Trinity in Muslim eyes moved generations of Christian apologists to develop theological strategies that would safeguard God's essential unity while insisting on the threeness of His persons. To be sure, Christian thinkers had been faced with

[264] Jurjānī, *Aqsām al-dīn*, § 54–53.

[265] Although I translate *sharīʿa* here as 'law', it should be noted that the term had a rather wider semantic range than today. In the Christian Arabic context, one finds *sharīʿat al-naṣrāniyya* in supersessionist discussions about the abrogation of Mosaic law. However, in both Muslim and Christian discourses, *sharīʿa* can also denote the totality of a revealed religion and not just law per se; see Norman Calder, 'Sharīʿa', *EI²* 9 (1997): 321–328, esp. 321–322.

[266] Bar Brīkhā, *al-Durra*, 7r–7v (missing from edition).

[267] For a summary of some Muslim objections to these doctrines, see Khoury, *Matériaux*, 4:405–435, 445–551.

such issues prior to Islam.[268] However, the emergence of an Arabic theological *koinē* meant that Christian apologists were able to develop—and by ʿAbdīshōʿ's time maintain—a new conceptual language under a very different set of circumstances.

Connected to God's triune nature was the issue of His Incarnation. Once again, Christians under Muslim rule faced repeated theological attacks against the doctrine of God's uniting with Christ's human nature.[269] For Christian writers, this meant articulating apologetic strategies that preserved the notion of a god who was at once unitary and capable of incarnation. Like the Trinity, apologetic strategies surrounding the Incarnation often discussed the attributes of God, whom Christian theologians considered to be transcendent while also functioning in the world of creation. But while different Christian confessions under Islamic rule tended to agree on Trinitarian matters, they were especially divided over Christology, and thus it was often in discussions about the Incarnation that apologetics and intra-Christian polemics intersect. For Christian theologians living under Muslim rule, the Trinity and Incarnation were important articles of faith that were in continual need of defence and re-articulation, in the face of religions that had their own conception of divine unity.

As to matters of cult, these are rather more extensive in ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme. They include baptism; the Eucharist; the veneration of the Cross; fasting; almsgiving; facing eastward in prayer; fastening the girdle (Syr. *zunnārā*; Ar. *zunnār*) in prayer; observing Sabbath on Sundays; fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays; and striking the clapper (Syr. *nāqōšā*; Ar. *nāqūs*) to signal the times of prayer. In Chapter 5, I will focus on two of the foregoing: the veneration of the Cross and the striking of the clapper. The former—the veneration of the Cross—neatly ties in with the two 'primary' topics of the Trinity and Incarnation previously mentioned. For many Muslim polemicists, the act of honouring the Cross raised questions about Christianity's purported monotheism. If Christians held that God is truly unseen and unique, how, then, could they venerate a manmade object? Moreover, was the Cross the object of worship or simply a symbol through which Christians were reminded of God's incarnation and sacrifice?[270] By the thirteenth century, the Cross had become a highly visible emblem of both Christian belief and ritual in the Islamicate world, and thus the issues surrounding these questions had as much socio-political significance as they did theological.[271]

[268] For example, the defence of Nicene Christianity against Arian charges of polytheism and tritheism in the 4th century; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: A&C Black, 1993), ch. 10.

[269] Khoury, *Matériaux*, 5:305–505.

[270] See Khoury, *Matériaux*, 5:507–551.

[271] For the Cross as both a topic of theology and social signifier in the Islamicate world, see Charles L. Tieszen, *Cross Veneration in the Medieval Islamic World: Christian Identity and Practice under Muslim Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

Unlike the veneration of the Cross, there have been far fewer studies of the call to prayer in interreligious polemics and apologetics. Like the Cross, the call to prayer could mark out Christians in Islamicate societies: while the striking of the clapper was not always perceived visually, it was most certainly audible. As we shall see in Chapter 5, this contested visual and acoustic landscape served as the basis for much that was written by Muslims of Christianity's devotional practice. For just as Muslim theologians had their own conceptions of monotheism, so too did they have their own ideas about how the call to prayer should be sounded. Yet, as we will also see, the literary space inhabited by Arabic-using Muslims and Christians enabled the latter to draw upon a shared religious vocabulary with which to commend such practices in the face of criticism. By seizing on a common lettered tradition, Christian theologians were able to provide renewed significance to the sacred traditions surrounding these practices.

A further aspect of this shared lettered tradition is evident within the very structure of ʿAbdīshōʿ's arguments. In his Arabic apologetics, he tends to use a dialectical reasoning common to *kalām* works. While there has been much debate about the emergence of Muslim *kalām*—with some postulating late antique Christian origins[272]—by ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime such methods of argumentation had become common across faiths.[273] We find instances of an unmistakably *kalām* style throughout ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra*, for example, where he engages his imaginary opponent with such formulae as: 'If the transgressor says…, we say…' (*fa-in qāla al-mukhālif…, qulnā*) or 'To he who says…, the response to him would be…' (*li-l-qā'il an yaqūl…fa-yakūnu jawābuhu…*).[274] As we shall see later in this study, ʿAbdīshōʿ also employs a division between rational (*ʿaqlī*) and revealed (*naqlī*) proof that is further characteristic of *kalām* works, as Hidemi Takahashi has noted with regard to Barhebraeus's theology.[275]

1.9 The Genre of Muslim Polemics against Christianity

Before closing this chapter, it is necessary to say something about the types of polemical texts directed against Christianity that were most common by ʿAbdīshōʿ's time. Perhaps the most widespread literary form of Muslim polemics

[272] For a summary of the debate, which is not a central concern here, see Treiger, 'The Origins of Kalām'.

[273] For examples from the medieval Jewish and Syriac milieu, see respectively Sarah Stroumsa, 'Saadya and Jewish kalam', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71–90; Hidemi Takahashi, 'Reception of Islamic Theology among Syriac Christians in the Thirteenth Century: Use of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in Barhebraeus' *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary*', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 2, no. 1–2 (2014): 170–192.

[274] *Durra*, ch. 4, 43–44, 102–103.

[275] Takahashi, 'Reception of Islamic Theology', 174.

was the *Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā* ('Response to the Christians') genre. Prominent among its early representatives were al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (d. 993); the founder of the Māturīdite school Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944); the Ashʿarite theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013); and the Muʿtazilite theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī (d. 1025).[276] Also important are the famous litterateur Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869) and the Baghdad Aristotelian Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī (d. 873).[277] A further genre of anti-Christian polemics was produced by Christian converts to Islam, whose works have recently been identified by Clint Hackenburg as 'apostate literature'.[278] Influential representatives of this genre were ʿAlī Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 780) and al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ayyūb (d. before 990).

Just as Christian apologists like ʿAbdīshōʿ built on the works of earlier Christian writers, so were Muslim polemicists of the thirteenth century reliant on earlier refutations of Christianity. A case in point comes from apostate literature written after the tenth century. Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā al-Mutaṭabbib, a twelfth-century physician from Baghdad and convert to Islam, drew much of his polemic from al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb's *Risāla ilā akhīhi ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb* ('Letter to His Brother ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb').[279] Ibn Ayyūb's work was, in turn, quoted extensively by the famous Ḥanbalite jurist Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya (d. 1322), whose *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ* ('The Sound Response to Those who have Corrupted the Religion of Christ') has been described by Jon Hoover as a 'battery of arguments for disputation against Christians'.[280] As such, anti-Christian refutations were intended mainly for intra-Muslim theological exposition as opposed to inter-religious dialogue in any live sense. Once again, this form of textual reuse should not be seen as a mere rehashing of earlier, more 'authentic' traditions. Christians from the Islamicate world drew from a deep wellspring of tradition and authority to counter Muslim criticisms, but so too did Muslim writers react to Christianity by citing what they considered reliable and expert authorities. Inter-religious controversy played an important role in compendia of Muslim *kalām*, which often contained entire refutations of Christianity as well as other religions.[281] While the earliest *mutakallimūn* were involved in debates with rival monotheists,

[276] The anti-Christian tracts of these authors have been collected, analysed, and translated in a single volume by David Thomas (ed. and tr.), *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[277] For the significance of these authors, see Seppo Rissanen, *Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 1993); David Thomas, "Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī: a Convert's Assessment of his former Faith', in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 137–155.

[278] Clint Hackenburg, 'Voices of the Converted: Christian Apostate Literature in Medieval Islam' (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2015).

[279] Hackenburg, 'Voices of the Converted', 272–287.

[280] Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya', 850.

[281] See, for example, refutations of Christianity integrated in al-Matūrīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (in Thomas, *Christian doctrines in Islamic Theology*, ch. 3); al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* (in ibid., ch. 4); and ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl* (in ibid., ch. 5). For critiques of

Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Mazdakites, anti-prophetic theists, and non-theist materialists, later handbooks of *kalām* would test the veracity of various Islamic doctrines against other religions, often in highly abstracted terms.[282] Thus, acquaintance with Christian doctrines was often regarded by Muslim scholars as a significant part of any good theological exercise.

But however much Muslim theologians reduced Christianity to abstractions, there were nevertheless Muslim thinkers who paid close attention to what Christians said and did. Gabriel Said Reynolds has revealed an unmistakable depth of knowledge about Christian practices in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *kalām* works.[283] In ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, Ibn Taymiyya's refutation was provoked by the anonymous *Letter from the People of Cyprus*, in addition to which he quotes the *Annals* of Saʿīd ibn Biṭrīq (d. 940), the apologies of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, and (indirectly) the *Kitāb al-Majālis* ('Book of Sessions') of Elias bar Shennāyā.[284] Similarly, the Mālikī judge and Ashʿarite theologian Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 1285) makes explicit references in his refutation to an apology by a twelfth-century Mozarabic priest from Toledo named Aghushtīn (*scil.*, 'Augustine').[285] Thus, as Hava Lazarus-Yafeh has pointed out, pre-modern Muslim polemicists did not attack Christianity from a position of ignorance. Rather, they possessed detailed and reliable information about Christianity's doctrines, its internal divisions, and devotional practices.[286] Given the importance and scale of this polemical tradition, I will survey salient critiques of Christianity by key representatives of the genre in Chapters 3 to 5. To emphasize the continued vitality of this genre beyond its earlier formation, I will focus on the polemics of Muslim writers who flourished between the twelfth century to ʿAbdīshōʿ's own lifetime (ca. 1250–1318).

*

Zoroastrianism in medieval works of *kalām*, see Guy Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes. ʿAbd al-Jabbār et ses devanciers* (Paris: Institut dominicain d'études orientales, 1974); Shaul Shaked, 'Some Islamic Reports concerning Zoroastrianism', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic in Islam* 17 (1994), 43–84; Michael Stausberg, 'Konkurrenz, Kritik und Innovation. Zur islamischen Kritik an der Religion Zarathustras', in *Religionskritik in interkultureller und interreligiöse Sicht*, ed. Heinz R. Schlette (Bonn: Borengässer, 1997), 116–140.

[282] As will be demonstrated in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

[283] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ch. 5.

[284] See generally Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 100. On Ibn Taymiyya's use of Ibn Biṭrīq's chronicle in his *Jawāb* to show how the Christians had constructed a false religious narrative, see Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya', 838. The *Jawāb*'s response to Ibn ʿAdī has been discussed by Emilio Platti, 'Towards an Interpretation of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's Terminology in his Theological Treatises', *Miscellanies of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies* 29 (2012): 61–71, here 62–63. Laurent Basanese (*Ibn Taymiyya. Réponse raisonable aux chrétiens?* [Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2012], 51–54) has demonstrated that several passages of the *Letter*, on which Ibn Taymiyya bases his response, are derived from the first 'session' (*majlis*) of Elias bar Shennāyā's *Kitāb al-Majālis*.

[285] Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim–Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean: The Splendid Replies of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285)* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 86–87.

[286] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (1996): 61–84, here 67–68.

Before attending to any of the issues outlined thus far, it is first necessary to situate ʿAbdīshōʿ in his time and place. This will be the task of the following chapter, in which I provide further context to the social, political, and intellectual background of ʿAbdīshōʿ's works. For now, at least, I hope to have contoured—and given a working definition of—the genre of apologetics that dominated so much of his written legacy.

2

The Life and Times of a 'Most Obscure Syrian'

Despite his immense importance to the history of Syriac literature, little information exists about the life of ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā. This scarcity of biographical data stands in stark contrast to ʿAbdīshōʿ's older and better-known Syriac Christian contemporary, Barhebraeus.[1] What follows is a survey of the scant information we do possess about ʿAbdīshōʿ, followed by an attempt to expand on them by examining his social, cultural, and intellectual milieu. Before proceeding, it is worth outlining the few received facts that have come down to us about ʿAbdīshōʿ's life. What little is known about ʿAbdīshōʿ—who in the preface of one work refers to himself as 'a most obscure Syrian' (*'allīlā d-suryāyē*)[2]—can be summarized in a paragraph. He first appears as Bishop of Shiggār (modern-day Sinjār in northern Iraq) and Bēt ʿArbāyē (located between Mosul and Nisibis) in 1279/80, and again in 1285/6, though we do not know when he was appointed to this episcopate. Between 1285/6 and 1290/1, he was promoted to the Metropolitan See of Nisibis and Armenia under the Catholicos-Patriarch Yahbalāhā III, and in February 1318 was present at the election of Yahbalāhā's successor, Timothy II, where his *Nomocanon* was declared an authoritative source of ecclesiastical law. ʿAbdīshōʿ died later that year, in November 1318.[3]

How might we furnish these facts, scattered and fragmentary as they are, with further insights? Very rarely given to writing self-referentially, ʿAbdīshōʿ supplies precious little from his own pen. More frustratingly, no extant historiographical source from his lifetime sheds any light on his activities. The East Syrian biographical tradition is principally concerned with the lives of the catholicoi of the Church of the East, which makes the task of writing a biographical overview of a

[1] Biographical information about Barhebraeus is found in relatively generous detail, deriving chiefly from the continuation of his *Ecclesiastical History* and a verse biography by his disciple Gabriel bar John of Barṭellī (later Dioscuros of Gāzartā d-Qardū upon his consecration as bishop). Further biographical data are found in autobiographical notes in manuscripts from Barhebraeus's own hand; see Takahashi, *Bio-Bibliography*, 1–57, 119–147.

[2] *Paradise*, 3.

[3] For a summary of these facts, see Jacques Dauvillier, 'Ebedjésus,' in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, ed. Raoul Naz (Paris: Letouzé et Ané, 1953), 92–134, here 92–93; Kaufhold, introduction, xviii–xix; Teule, "Abdisho'," 750.

Christian Thought in the Medieval Islamicate World: ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition. Salam Rassi, Oxford University Press. © Salam Rassi 2022. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192846761.003.0003

bishop all the more difficult.[4] Biographical notices concerning metropolitans and bishops do feature in other ecclesiastical histories, most notably that of Barhebraeus and his continuator, who incorporate narratives about the Church of the East into the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church.[5] But once again, no information about ʿAbdīshōʿ is found here.[6] Neither does he occur in the biography of his contemporary and superior, Yahbalāhā III (r. 1281–1317).[7]

In order to glimpse beyond the margins of ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology, we must examine the times in which he lived. In doing so, I will (i) consult his own testimony, particularly his prefaces, from which few though limited glimpses can be gleaned; (ii) discuss church life under Mongol Ilkhanid rule (1258–1336) in a region of upper Mesopotamia I generally refer to here as the Jazīra;[8] and lastly (iii) explore the intellectual landscape in which he wrote, identifying the most notable scholarly circles of his day. By addressing these matters, I ask whether it is possible to situate ʿAbdīshōʿ's copious apologetic writings—the main focus of this book—within a specific intellectual, social, and cultural setting. While such an approach may uncover few new facts about our author's life, it will nevertheless provide insights into the world that gave shape to his legacy.

2.1 Canon Law and the Path to Success

ʿAbdīshōʿ's date of birth is unknown to us, though Albert Abouna speculates that it was sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century.[9] Neither do we know for

[4] See, for example, the patriarchal history of ʿAmr ibn Mattā, *Akhbār faṭārikat kursī al-mashriq: min kitāb al-Majdal li-ʿAmr ibn Mattā*, ed. Henri Gismondi (Rome: F. de Luigi, 1896), with continuations by Mārī ibn Sulaymān (fl. twelfth century) and Salībā ibn Yuḥannā (fl. first half of fourteenth century).

[5] As Witold Witakowsky ('The Ecclesiastical Chronicle of Gregory Bar 'Ebroyo,' *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 6 [2006]: 61–81, here 74–75) has suggested, Barhebraeus's inclusion of the history of the East Syrian catholicoi in his *Ecclesiastical History* reflects his position as Maphrian of the East (i.e., of the former Sassanian territories, east of the Euphrates), where the Jacobite community had developed a degree of communal autonomy from their fellow church members in the 'West'—that is, those sees of the Syrian Orthodox Church under the direct authority of Antioch—and a sense of shared history with their East Syrian neighbours in Mesopotamia.

[6] For the history's section on the hierarchs of the 'East', see the second volume of Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, ed. and tr. Jean Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy, 3 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1872–1877).

[7] Anonymous, *Tašʿīṯā d-Mār(y) Ya(h)ḇalāhā wa-ḏ-Rabban Ṣawmā*, ed. Pier Giorgio Borbone (n.p.: Lulu Press, 2009) and idem (tr.), *Un ambassadeur du Khan Argun en Occident: histoire de Mar Yahballaha III et de Rabban Sauma (1281–1317)*, tr. Pier Giorgio Borbone (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

[8] Here, I use Carole Hillenbrand's definition: 'The area of the Jazīra was traditionally subdivided into three territories: 1. Diyār Bakr to the north, with the major cities in Mayyāfāriqīn and Āmid; 2. Diyār Muḍar to the west, with its principal towns of al-Raqqa, Ḥarrān, Edessa and Sarūj; 3. Diyār Rabīʿa, the eastern and largest province of the Jazīra. Its major cities included Balad, Mosul, Mardīn and Nuṣaybīn.' Carole Hillenbrand, 'The History of the Jazīra, 1100–1250: A Short Introduction', in *The Art of Syria and the Jazīra, 1100–1250*, ed. Julian Raby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9–19, here 9.

[9] Albert Abouna, *Adab al-lugha al-arāmiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1970), 446.

certain his place of birth. According to Joseph De Kelaita, he was born in the region of Gāzartā (known in Arabic as Jazīrat ibn ʿUmar, in modern-day Cizre, south-eastern Turkey).[10] No evidence is cited for this regionalization, which appears again in a brief article by P.K. Varguese.[11] Both authors add that ʿAbdīshōʿ entered the Monastery of Mār John and Mār Aḥā in Gāzartā, near his purported place of his birth.[12] Once again, no evidence is provided to place ʿAbdīshōʿ's early activities here. In fact, the association of ʿAbdīshōʿ with Gāzartā and the Monastery of Mār John and Mār Aḥā is quite likely a case of mistaken identity. In the first edition of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Authors*, the seventeenth-century scholar Abraham Ecchelensis erroneously identified ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā as ʿAbdīshōʿ of Gāzartā, the second patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church who succeeded the assassinated John Sullāqā in 1561,[13] and who hailed from the region of Gāzartā and lived as a monk at the Monastery of Mār John and Mār Aḥā.[14] Aside from their shared name, the conflation of the two ʿAbdīshōʿs may have arisen from the fact that both authors excelled as poets and wrote professions of faith.[15] In any case, this error persisted in subsequent scholarship until corrected by Joseph Assemani, in his *Bibliotheca Orientalis* in 1737.[16] With that said, it is not inconceivable that ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā was native to the region of Gāzartā or anywhere else in the Jazīra. Nor was it unknown for the Church of the East to consecrate bishops and metropolitans native to their sees,[17] which in ʿAbdīshōʿ's case would have fallen somewhere within the ecclesiastical province of Nisibis.

A much firmer indication of origin comes from a note in a manuscript described by Addai Scher, now located in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. In it, a certain metropolitan of Nisibis named ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Zbayrīyā, or Zubayrāyā, is reported to have donated a collection of books to the Monastery of Mār Awgen on Mt Izlā.[18] Since the place name Zubayrīyā, or 'Zubayr,' does not appear in any known topographies of

[10] See introduction to *Paradise*, 4.

[11] P.K. Varguese, 'Mar Oudisho Metropolitan of Suwa (Died in 1318) and his Literary Works', *The Harp* 8, no. 9 (1995–1996): 355–363, here 355.

[12] Abouna, *Adab*, 4; Varghese, 'Mar Oudisho', 355. Kaufhold (introduction, xvii) appears to uphold this claim.

[13] Kaufhold, 'Abraham Ecchellensis', 124–125.

[14] ʿAbdīshōʿ of Gāzartā tells us as much in the beginning of a profession of faith: 'I, ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Ḥannā of Bēṯ Mārōn, from the city of Gāzartā, on the site of the river Tigris, formerly a monk at the monastery of Mār Aḥā and Mār John…'; Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1:538.

[15] For works belonging to ʿAbdīshōʿ of Gāzartā, see Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1:536ff; Abouna, *Adab*, 469–472; Herman G.B. Teule, "Abdishoʿ of Gazarta', in *GEDSH*, 4.

[16] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1:538, discussed by See Kaufhold, 'Abraham Ecchellensis', 125, n. 37 and 38.

[17] For example, Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn was born in the vicinity of Mardin, where he was bishop before ascending to the Metropolitan See of Nisibis and Armenia in 1190; see Jean Maurice Fiey, *Nisibe, metropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origins à nos jours*, CSCO 388 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1977), 105.

[18] Dublin, Chester Beatty Syc. 705 (olim Mardin, Scher 9). 1r. French translation in Addai Scher, 'Notice des mss. syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque de l'évêché chaldéen de Mardin',

Nisibis and its environs, Jean Maurice Fiey has suggested that the name could alternatively be read 'Zubaydiyya', a village located in the region of Āmid (modern-day Diyarbakır).[19] Indeed, such a reading is feasible given the ease with which a scribe might confuse the letters *rēš* and *dālaṯ*. A further possibility is supplied by Mārī ibn Sulaymān's continuation of the *Kitāb al-majdal*'s patriarchal history. Here, we learn that the catholicos Barṣawmā (r. 1134–1136) hailed from a village named Zaydiyya in the eparchy of Nisibis (*fī aʿmāl Nuṣaybīn*).[20] Complicating matters further is the fact that there were in fact two metropolitans of Nisibis named ʿAbdīshōʿ in the thirteenth century: aside from our author, we know of one who served under Yahbalāhā II (r. 1190–1222).[21] One piece of evidence in favour of an attribution to our author, however, is the fact that two works entitled *Mnāraṯ quḏšē* ('Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries') and *Kṯāḇā d-ʾīṯīqōn* ('The Ethicon') appear in the list of books in the Dublin manuscript—most likely Barhebraeus's famous *summa theologica* and moral philosophy.[22] Also listed is a grammar by Ishōʿyahb bar Malkōn, who flourished in the first half of the thirteenth century. It is therefore entirely reasonable to assume that the metropolitan of Nisibis who donated the books to Mār Awgen was indeed ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, though we must suspend judgement on whether the place of his birth was Zubayrīyā, Zubaydiyya, or Zaydiyya.

We also know that ʿAbdīshōʿ was a monk before his first episcopate. Since the reforms of Babai the Great (d. 628), it was common practice to select bishops from the monastic ranks.[23] However, whether this involved the Monastery of Mār John and Mār Aḥā in the case of our author remains unknown. Nevertheless, prefaces in two of ʿAbdīshōʿ's major legal works throw light on both his monastic beginnings and early career as a writer. In stating his purpose for writing the *Nomocanon*, he addresses potential critics who might think him presumptuous for writing a synthesis of canon law 'before reaching the rank of bishop' (*rabbūṯ kāhnūṯā*).[24] Moreover, he compares himself to the catholicos Elias I Abū Ḥalīm (r. 1028–1049) who wrote a treatise on inheritance law 'while still beneath an

Revue des bibliothèques 18 (1908): 64–95, here 67. This manuscript is also discussed by David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 48.

[19] Fiey, *Nisibe*, 104, cited in Claude Cahen, 'Le Diyar Bakr au temps des premiers Urtuḳids', *Journal Asiatique* 227 (1935): 219–276, here 222 and 225; Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East*, 48.

[20] ʿAmr ibn Mattā, *Akhbār fatārikat kursī al-mashriq*, 153; see also Fiey, *Nisibe*, 104–105.

[21] Fiey, *Nisibe*, 104.

[22] On these works, see Takahashi, *Bio–Bibliography*, 147–156. I am not aware of other Syriac works bearing these title.

[23] These reforms addressed, among other things, the issue of episcopal marriage, which had been authorized some two centuries earlier at the Synods of 484 and 486. See Jean Baptiste Chabot (ed. and tr.), *Synodicon orientale, ou, Recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 61ff (text), 308ff (trans). See also Wilhelm Baum and Diet W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 32.

[24] *Nomocanon*, 5–6.

abbot' (*rēš dayrā*).[25] Later in life, in his preface to the *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements*, ʿAbdīshōʿ gives a more explicit indication of his monastic past:

> Because I wrote the *Concise Collection of Synodal Canons* (*scil.*, the *Nomocanon*) at a time of monasticism (*b-zaḇnā d-ʾīḥīḏāyūṯā*), I did not possess the authority to introduce and compose anything from my own opinion, as propriety (*ṭaḵsā d-wālīṯā*) would demand. But now, by the grace of Christ, that I have been made worthy to serve the see of the metropolitan province of the eparchy of Nisibis, a city in Mesopotamia, I have begun to write this book, while trusting in the aid of He who says, 'Wherever you remember my name I will come to you and bless you.' (Ex 20:24)[26]

He also informs us in the preface to his *Nomocanon* that he had been instructed by 'those who hold the rudder of Church governance' to make use of his talents and produce a compendium of canon law.[27] While it is possible to interpret this passage as a customary show of humility common to Syriac preface writing,[28] might we also venture that the hierarchy saw in this monk a promising talent? Given that a firm knowledge of canon law would have been key to ecclesiastical governance, it is possible that ʿAbdīshōʿ's composition of the *Nomocanon* paved the way for his consecration as bishop. However, in the absence of further biographical data, this too must remain speculation.

Aside from giving us a rare glimpse into his early life, the above evidence provides some suggestion that the *Nomocanon* was among ʿAbdīshōʿ's first original compositions—a work that few scholars have attempted to date.[29] Although we cannot be precise about its date of composition, it must have been before 1279/80, the year in which we first encounter ʿAbdīshōʿ as Bishop of Shiggār and Bēt ʿArbāyē. An indication of this comes from a note in Jerusalem, SMMJ 159 by someone who had seen a lectionary produced by our author's own hand at the Monastery of Mār Michael of Tarʿīl near Mosul 'while he was still [a simple] bishop'.[30] ʿAbdīshōʿ next emerges as bishop in a colophon from another gospel manuscript, Vatican, Borg. syr. 169, in which the scribe informs us that he had copied it from an exemplar made by our author in 1285/6 'while he was [still]

[25] *Nomcanon*, 6. [26] *Ṭukkāsā*, 4 (text); 5 (trans.).
[27] *Nomocanon*, 1–2, quoted at the beginning of Chapter 1.
[28] See Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface*, 190–180.
[29] Hubert Kaufhold ('La Litérature Pseudo–Canonique Syriaque, in *Les apocryphes syriaques*', ed. Muriel Debié and Alan Desreumaux [Paris: Geuthner, 2005], 147–167, here 161) has stated—without providing evidence—that the work was composed around 1280. Aprim Mooken ('Codification of Canon Law', 371–180) mentions that ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote his *Nomocanon* in 1290. Again, there appears to be no clear foundation for this assertion. Mooken may have derived his dating from Joseph De Kelaita's printed edition of the *Nomocanon*, which bears in its title the date '1290 A.D.', though nowhere in his introduction does De Kelaita propose that the work was composed in that year.
[30] Kaufhold, introduction, xxii. On this monastery, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2:660–671.

Bishop of Shiggār of Bēt ʿArbāyē'.[31] Thus, in addition to excelling at canon law before his elevation, ʿAbdīshōʿ also distinguished himself as a copyist.

Among ʿAbdīshōʿ's works that he composed prior to becoming metropolitan is a lengthy preface (*muqaddima*) to an alchemical treatise attributed to Aristotle. Although we do not know when precisely he composed it, the author refers to himself in this work as 'the feeble ʿAbdīshōʿ, Bishop of Sinjār' (*anā al-ḍaʿīf ʿAbdīshūʿ usquf Sinjār*).[32]

2.2 The Metropolitan See of Nisibis and Armenia

We cannot be sure when precisely ʿAbdīshōʿ was elevated to the See of Nisibis and Armenia. Our only indication comes from his preface to the *Paradise of Eden*, where he tells us that he composed the work as Metropolitan in 1290/1, before adding a gloss to it some sixteen years later.[33] Since he is last encountered as Bishop of Shiggār and Bēt ʿArbāyē in 1285/6, his promotion must have occurred between then and 1290/1. His appointment to this see was no small matter, for according to Canon 21 of the Synod of Isaac (410), the Metropolitan of Nisibis ranked third in the entire East Syrian hierarchy, after the Metropolitan of Elam (or Jundishapur) and the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.[34] This was to remain the case well into the Middle Ages and throughout ʿAbdīshōʿ's own lifetime.[35] By Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn's time (ca. 1246), the Metropolitan See of Greater Armenia, with its seat in Khlāṭ (modern-day Ahlat on the northwestern coast of Lake Van), was annexed by Nisibis,[36] an addition that would remain in place under ʿAbdīshōʿ's tenure. We can also be certain that ʿAbdīshōʿ received his appointment from the catholicos Yahbalāhā III who, according to his biographer, ordained no less than seventy-five bishops and metropolitans in his lifetime.[37]

[31] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1:139; Addai Scher, 'Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques du Musée Borgia aujourd'hui à la Bibliothèque Vaticane', *Journal Asiatique* 10, no. 13 (1909): 249–287, here 284.

[32] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *Tafṣīr risālat Aristū fi al–ṣināʿa*, Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale de l'Université Saint–Joseph 252, 2v. Digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, project number: USJ 252.

[33] *Paradise*, 1–2.

[34] *Nomocanon*, 379; *Ṭukkāsā*, 70.16ff (text); 71.17ff (trans.); Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, 32 (text), 270 (trans.).

[35] On Nisibis's continued prominence, see Buṭrus Ḥaddad (ed.), *Mukhtaṣar al-akhbār al-biʿiyya* (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Dīyāwān, 2000), 124 (an ecclesiastical chronicle from the early eleventh century); Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Ibn at-Taiyib. Fiqh an-Nasrânîya, 'Das Recht der Christenheit'*, ed. and tr. Wilhelm Hoenerbach and Otto Spies, CSCO 161–162 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956-1957), 89 (text), 80–81 (trans,); Ibn Mattā, *Akhbār faṭārikat kursī al-mashriq*, 126 (Ṣalībā ibn Yuḥannā's continuation).

[36] We first encounter the addition of 'Armenia' in a letter by Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn to the deacon Saʿīd; see Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 3/1:297. Cf. Fiey, *Nisibe*, 106.

[37] Borbone, *Taš̱ʿīṯā*, 84 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 17 (trans.).

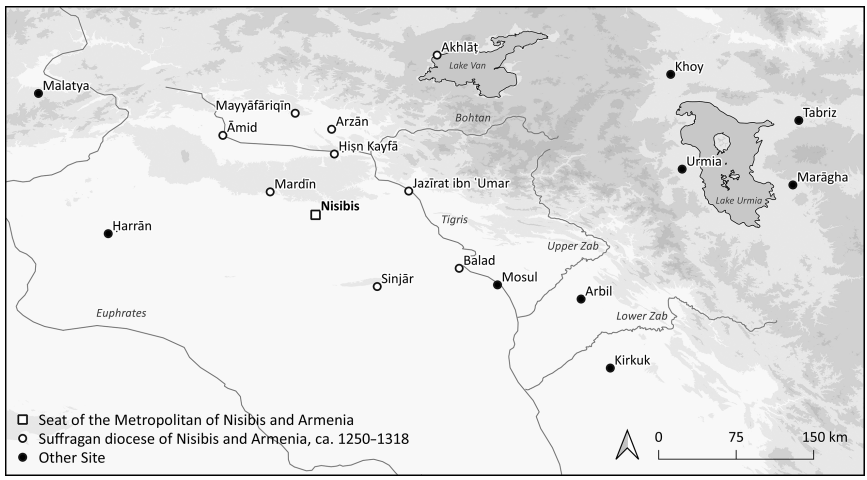

Figure 2.1 Nisibis and its environs

But what precisely were the geographical boundaries of the ecclesiastical province of Nisibis and Armenia in ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime? In his *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements*, ʿAbdīshōʿ redacts Canon 21 of the Synod of Mār Isaac to include thirteen suffragan dioceses of Nisibis: Arzōn, Qūbē, Bēt Raḥīmai, Balad, Shiggār, Qardū, Tamānōn, Bēt Zabdai, Khlāṭ, Ḥarrān, Āmid, Adhōrmā, and Rēsh ʿAynā (Figure 2.1).[38] ʿAbdīshōʿ's list is misleading, however, as he includes dioceses that had once belonged to Nisibis but which at one time or another ceased to exist, leading Jean Maurice Fiey to describe them rather uncharitably as 'pathetic vestiges of a more glorious era'.[39] David Wilmshurst has gone further, claiming that 'Abdīshōʿ's redaction of the canon was a 'shameless act of forgery' intended to make his province appear larger than it was.[40] It seems likelier to me that while ʿAbdīshōʿ's list does not conform to the See of Nisibis's actual geographical limits, it is to some degree reflective of the reality of his day. While temporary gains were made under Mongol rule, particularly in China and Central Asia, many of the Church's ancient interior provinces in the southern, central, and eastern part of its Mesopotamian heartland had either receded or disappeared altogether since the ninth century, forcing its presence further north.[41] Whatever the reasons for ʿAbdīshōʿ's recension of Canon 21, the sufragan sees of Nisibis and Armenia that remained in the latter half of the thirteenth century

[38] Bar Brīkhā, *Ṭukkāsā*, 70–72 (text), 72–73 (trans.).

[39] Fiey, *Nisibe*, 110: 'débris pitoyables de temps plus glorieux'.

[40] David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East* (London: East and West Publishing, 2011), 273.

[41] Jacques Dauvillier, 'Les provinces chaldéennes « de l'extérieur » au moyen âge', in *Mélanges offerts au R. P. Ferdinand Cavallera, doyen de la faculté de theologie de Toulouse à l'occasion de la quarantiéme année de son professorat à l'Institut Catholique* (Toulouse: Bibliothéque de l'Institut Catholique, 1948), 261–316, here 302; Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East*, 17.

were: (i) Arzōn (Arzān in Arabic) on the east bank of the Garzansu, a tributary of the Tigris; (ii) Balad (today's Eski-Mosul); (iii) Shiggār (Sinjār in Arabic); (iv) Mayperqīṭ (Mayyāfāriqīn in Arabic), in modern-day Silvan; (v) Mardin; (vi) Gāzartā (Jazīrat ibn ʿUmar in Arabic); (vii) Khlāṭ (today's Ahlat); and (viii) Āmid (today's Diyarbakır).[42]

2.3 Church Life under Mongol Rule

The thirteenth century saw the ascendency of Mongol military and political power in western Asia, which began with waves of military incursions towards the end of Chinggis Khan's life. The earliest Syriac witness to the Mongol invasion of the Jazīra comes from the *Chronicle to 1234*, which details the devastation wrought by uncoordinated and sporadic raids, presumably by the Mongol generals Jebe and Sübedei as they pushed westwards after invading Azerbaijan in the late 1220s. Further raids were made by Chormughun, who pursued remnants of the defeated army of the Khwārazmshah Jalāl al-Dīn as far as Āmid in 1230.[43] Here, the anonymous chronicler reports massacres of men, woman, and children—Christian and Muslim alike—in the cities of Edessa, Ḥarrān, Surūj, Āmid, Mardin, Nisibis, Mayyāfāriqīn, and Mosul.[44] So great was the violence that the East Syrian hymnographer George Wardā composed a liturgical poem commemorating the destruction of Karemlesh, in which he likens the Mongol onslaught to 'a lightning bolt from a land far away and was for all flesh oppressive and painful'.[45] Direct Mongol suzerainty over the region began in earnest following the sack of Baghdad in 1258 and the destruction of the Abbasid caliphate by Hülegü, the grandson of Chinngis Khan. Dispatched from Mongolia by his brother, the Great Khan Möngke (r. 1251–1259), Hülegü's conquest of Iran, Iraq, the Caucasus, and much of Anatolia would inaugurate a seventy-year period of Mongol rule under the Ilkhanid dynasty, a branch of the Toluid line of the Chinngisid family that ruled across Central Asia and China. The Mongols' western Asian acquisitions, therefore, formed part of what Thomas Allsen has described as one of the 'largest contiguous land-based empires in history'.[46]

[42] Fiey, *Nisibe*, 104–110.

[43] The specifics of these raids are not given in the *History to 1234 A.D.*, though their date coincides with these early invasions. For a summary account of the pre–Toluid Mongol invasion of the Jazīra, see Douglas Patton, *Badr al-Dīn Luʾluʾ: Atabeg of Mosul, 1211–1259* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 51–52.

[44] Anonymous, *Anonymi auctoris Chronicon ad A.C. 1234*, ed. and tr. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, 3 vols., CSCO 81, 82, 109 (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1916, 1920, 1937), 3:236–237.

[45] Cited in David Bundy, 'George Warda as a Historian and Theologian of the 13th Century', in *Philosophie = Philosophy; Tolérance*, ed. Aristide Théodoridès et al. (Brussels: Société Belge d'Études Orientales, 1992), 191–200, here 192; idem, 'Interpreter of the Acts of Gods and Humans: George Warda, Historian and Theologian of the 13th Century', *The Harp* 6, no. 1 (1993): 7–20, here 12.

[46] Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251–1259* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 7.

In the wake of Hülegü's campaigns, a patchwork of vassal states would emerge in the Jazīra. In fact, by the time the Mongols arrived, the region was already contested by the famous atabeg of Mosul Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu' (d. 1259); the Artuqids (a Turkoman dynasty based in Mardin); the Seljuks of Rūm (i.e., Anatolia); and a branch of the Ayyubid dynasty based in Ḥiṣn Kayf. Those of them who submitted peaceably to Hülegü's northward advance from Baghdad were well-rewarded. Lu'lu"s diplomacy with Hülegü, for example, spared the inhabitants of Mosul the fate of many nearby settlements, while the Artuqids of Mardin and the Ayyubids of Ḥiṣn Kayf survived as client dynasties long after the Mongol conquests.[47] Furthermore, throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the Jazīra would become a frontier zone between two warring states: the Ilkhanate and the Cairo-based Mamluk Sultanate (1252–1517), with the Euphrates forming an effective boundary.[48] The long and bitter conflict between the two powers would have ideological as well as military consequences for the Jazīra region. Since the Mongol defeat at ʿAyn Jalūṭ in 1260, the Ilkhans saw the Mamluks' stubborn refusal to submit as a direct challenge to its imperial ideology. According to the Mamluks, meanwhile, the Mongols were transgressors in the Islamic world, as evinced by their military and diplomatic alliances with the Armenians, Georgians, and Latins, and their execution of the last Abbasid Caliph.[49] Even after the Ilkhanate's official conversion to Islam in 1295 (on which more below), many in the Mamluk sultanate continued to see the Mongols as religiously suspect. This attitude was most vocally expressed by the famous Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya, who issued a *fatwā* on whether the city of Mardin—under Ilkhanid suzerainty but governed by the Muslim Artuqids—constituted a part of the Islamic world.[50]

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[47] Patton, *Badr al–Dīn Lu'lu'*, 79–83; Ludger Ilisch, 'Geschichte der Artuqidenherrschaft von Mardin zwischen Mamluken und Mongolen 1260–1410 AD' (PhD diss. University of Münster, 1984). On the Ayyūbids of Ḥiṣn Kayf, see Edmund C. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 194–196.

[48] See Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk–Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 106–137; idem, 'Northern Syria between the Mongols and Mamluks: Political Boundary, Military Frontier, and Ethnic Affinities', in *Frontiers in Question Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700*, ed. Daniel Power and Naomi Standen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 128–152.

[49] See Reuven Amitai-Preiss, 'Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks', in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, ed. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Brill: Leiden, 1999), 57–71; Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27ff. For the role played by the Armenians and Georgians in the Mongol invasions of Syria, see Angus D. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks: War and Diplomacy during the Reigns of Het'um II (1289–1307)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[50] See Yahya Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya on Fleeing from Sin; Kinds of Emigration; the Status of Mardin; the Domain of Peace/War, Domain Composite; the Conditions for Challenging Power* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2006), 63–92. On other *fatwās* by Ibn Taymiyya issued against the backdrop of the Ilkhanid–Mamlūk War, see Denise Aigle, 'The Mongol Invasions of Bilād al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three "Anti-Mongol" Fatwas', *Mamluk Study Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 89–120.

The relationship between the Ilkhanate and its Christian subjects was from the very beginning a complex one. During Hülegü's sack of Baghdad in 1258, the city's Christian population was spared as their Muslim neighbours were put to the sword.[51] This event has prompted historians to debate the Ilkhans' good disposition towards their Christian subjects. In 1969, Spuler argued that during their reign, 'the Nestorians of Northern Mesopotamia could naturally expect special benefits, since a large proportion of the newcomers from Central Asia were coreligionists'.[52] Such co-religionists included members of the Mongol aristocracy in Iran, whose forbears converted to Christianity in previous centuries as a result of the Church of the East's missionary enterprise along the Silk Road,[53] though most of the early Ilkhans were themselves shamanists with Buddhist leanings.[54] This, along with the Ilkhans' hostility towards the Mamluks, led Jean Maurice Fiey to argue that Ilkhanid rule ushered in a golden age for Christians in Iraq, many of whom 'opted' for the Mongol cause against their Muslim neighbours. This special relationship, according to Fiey, would abruptly end following the Ilkhan Ghāzān's conversion to Islam in 1295.[55] René Grousset expressed similar views, going so far as to assert that the Church played a decisive role in the Mongols' policy against the Mamluks and fostered hopes that the Ilkhans might one day convert to Christianity.[56]

More recently, however, scholars have argued that the Mongols' favourable treatment towards Christians has been overstated. Peter Jackson points out that the sparing of the Christian population of Baghdad was probably due to the intercession of Hülegü's Christian wife Dokuz Khatun, since no such compassion was shown to Christians during Hülegü's conquest of the Jazīra and his invasion

[51] For Barhebraeus's account of the destruction, see Gregory Abū al–Faraj Barhebraeus, *Gregorii Barhberbrae Chronicon Syriacum*, ed. Paul Bejan (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1890), 505 (text); idem, *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician*, tr. E.A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 1:430–431 (trans.).

[52] Bertold Spuler, *The Muslim World: A Historical Survey*, vol. 1, *The Mongol Period*, tr. F.R. C. Bagley (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 25.

[53] See Erica C.D. Hunter, 'Conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in A.D. 1007', *Zentralasiatische Studien* 22 (1989–91), 142–163; idem, 'The Church of the East in Central Asia', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 129–149.

[54] With the exception of Aḥmad Tegüder, who was the first Ilkhan to convert to Islam prior to the Ilkhanate's official conversion in 1295. Following George Lane (*Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* [London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003], viii–ix), I define the 'early Ilkhans' here as those who reigned before Ghāzān's rise to power, namely Hülegü (r. 1254–1265), Abaqa (r. 1265–1281), Aḥmad Tegüder (r. 1281–1284); Arghun (r. 1284–1291); Gaikhatu (r. 1291–1295), and Baidu (r. 1295).

[55] Jean Maurice Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols (Il-Khanat de Perse, XIIIe–XIVe siècles)*, CSCO 362 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1975), 33–44.

[56] René Grousset, *Histoire de croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, 3 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1936), 3:562. Wilmshurst makes a similar though briefer assertion to this effect in idem, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East*, 16–17.

of Syria, the latter of which was headed by the Christian general Kitbughā.[57] Such realities on the ground are vividly demonstrated by the Muslim historian Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī (d. 1326), who witnessed the Mongol invasion of Baalbek as a child. Here, he mentions that Kitbughā 'tended towards Christianity, but did not show an inclination towards the Christians, due to his adherence to the laws of the Yasa (*āsā*) of Chinngis Khan'.[58] Peter Jackson has also shown that it was common for the early Ilkhans to exaggerate their pro-Christian leanings during diplomatic exchanges with the Papacy and the monarchs of Latin Europe in the hope of securing military alliances against a common Mamluk foe.[59] Within the field of Syriac studies, David Bundy has challenged Fiey's assertion that the Christians 'opted' for the Mongol cause. In doing so, Bundy distinguishes between Armenian and Syriac attitudes towards their overlords: the Armenian sources reflect the territorial ambitions of the Kingdom of Cilicia, which benefited from a strategic alliance with the Mongols against the Mamluks.[60] Syriac Christians, by contrast, had lived for centuries as political subalterns in Muslim lands, and were therefore mindful of their dependence on a few individuals at the Mongol court. Thus, their position within the Ilkhanid body politic was at best fluid, and there is little evidence that they expected to achieve a 'restoration' of Christianity in the region.[61]

It is in *this* light that we should see the Church of the East's relationship with the Ilkhanid state in ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's lifetime. While it would be an exaggeration to characterize the Mongols' religious policy as one of 'tolerance' in the modern sense, it was certainly the case that the *yasa* (the customary law of the Steppe formalised by Chinggis Khan) demanded that all conquered faiths be treated equitably in return for service and obedience to the empire. As Barhebraeus remarked:

> With the Mongols there is neither slave nor free man; neither believer nor heathen; neither Christian nor Jew. Instead, they regard all men as belonging to the same stock. Any who approaches them and offers them something of the world's riches (*meddem d-mamōn ʿālmā*), they accept and entrust to him

[57] Peter Jackson, 'The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered', in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Outside World*, eds. Reven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 249–290, here 273.

[58] Translated in Reuven Amitai, 'An Arabic Biographical Account of Kitbughā, the Mongol General Defeated at 'Ayn Jālūṭ', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 33 (2007): 219–234, here 226.

[59] Peter Jackson, 'Hulegu Khan and the Christians: The Making of a Myth', in *Experience of Crusading: Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, vol. 2, *Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, ed. Peter Edbury and Jonathan Philips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196–213; idem, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005), 165ff.

[60] David Bundy, 'The Syriac and Armenian Christian Responses to the Islamification of the Mongols', in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland Publications, 1996), 33–55, here 37–42.

[61] Bundy, 'The Syriac and Armenian Christian Responses', 42–48.

> whatever office he seeks, whether great or small, and whether he knows how to administer it or not. All they demand [in return] is strenuous service (*tešmeštā tḵīḇtā*) and loyalty.[62]

In particular, the early Ilkhans showed a special reverence for the clergy of all conquered faiths by exempting Muslim clerics, Christian priests, and Buddhist *toyins* from tax.[63] Ilkhans such as Hülegü, Abaqa, and Arghun also valued members of the religious classes for their supposed astrological and alchemical expertise. We learn of one such case from Barhebraeus, who reports that in 1263, the inhabitants of Jazīrat ibn ʿUmar (Gāzartā) were spared massacre after the city's East Syrian bishop, Ḥnānīshōʿ, professed knowledge of alchemy (*ʾummānūṯā d-ḵīmīya*), promising Hülegü as much gold as he wanted.[64] It was possibly for this reason that Ḥnānīshōʿ was later appointed governor of Jazīrat ibn ʿUmar. In 1268, however, Ḥnānīshōʿ was executed by royal decree (*puqdānā*), his head placed above the gates of the city. The precise reason for his execution is unclear; Barhebraeus simply tells us that he had 'thrust himself into worldly affairs' (*aʿ ʿel napšeh b-suʿrānē ʿālmānāyē*).[65] Another example of a failed attempt by Christians to garner favour with the Mongols occurred in 1274 at the Monastery of Mār Michael of Tarʿīl near Mosul, where a monk was 'discovered in fornication with a Muslim woman' and converted to Islam. The affair prompted the monks of the monastery to petition a Mongol captain of the local soldiery named Tarpashi to have the apostate seized and punished. However, opposition from the local Muslim population was such that Tarpashi's troops were forced to back down.[66] Thus, special favour was not naturally expected by the Christians of the Jazīra but rather had always been hard won.

It was at court that members of the Church of the East hierarchy forged more official client–patron networks with the Mongol ruling elite. Our richest source of information in this regard comes from the anonymous Syriac biography of Yahbalāhā III. Here, we learn that the catholicos-patriarch began life as a monk named Mark from Koshang, a city in northern China ruled by the Önggüds, Turkic vassals of the Mongol Empire and members of the Church of the East.[67] After taking up a life of monasticism, he and his spiritual master, a Christian from Khan Baligh (modern Beijing) named Rabban Ṣawmā, decided to travel westwards on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, with the encouragement and blessings of Kublai, the

[62] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, 575 (text). My translation is taken (with modifications) from Budge, *Chronography*, 1:490.

[63] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, 489 (text), Budge, *Chronography*, 418 (trans.); ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAṭā Malik al-Juwaynī, *Genghis Khan: History of the World Conqueror*, tr. J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 599. Cf. Jackson, *The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered*, 265.

[64] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, 520 (text), Budge, *Chronography*, 443 (trans.).

[65] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, 525 (text), *Chronography*, 448 (trans.).

[66] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, 527 (text), Budge, *Chronography*, 450–451 (trans.).

[67] Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 8–10 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 65–68 (trans.).

Great Khan of the Mongol Empire.[68] Written in the style of a hagiography, the author of the *Biography* describes at length the exemplary holiness of its protagonists, placing particular emphasis on their asceticism and eagerness to visit the shrines of the Holy Land.[69] However, as Pier Giorgio Borbone has shown, the true purpose of the two monks' long voyage west was most likely as official envoys of Kublai.[70] Upon reaching Baghdad, Mark and Rabban Ṣawmā were dissuaded from continuing onwards to Palestine due to the ongoing conflict between the Mongols and Mamluks along the Euphrates. Instead, we hear of their visits to the many East Syrian monasteries and shrines located throughout the Jazīra region, including Mār Michael of Tarʿīl near Mosul and Mār Awgen on Mt Izlā outside Nisibis.[71] In his continuation of the patriarchal history of the *Kitāb al-majdal*, Ṣalībā ibn Yuḥannā adds that the two monks also visited the Monastery of Mār Sabrīshōʿ at Bēt Qōqē near Arbil, where an anchorite (*ḥabīs*) named Rabban Sullāqā told Mark that his presence there was of no benefit, prophesizing that he would go to Baghdad where God would choose him to lead the Church.[72]

Sure enough, Mark went to Baghdad where in 1280 he was consecrated Metropolitan of Kathay and Öng by the catholicos-patriarch Denḥā II, while Rabban Ṣawmā was made Visitor-General (*sāʿōrā gawwānāyā*, 'perideutes').[73] A year later, Mark was elected to the Throne of Seleucia Ctesiphon upon Denḥā's death the following year, taking the patriarchal name Yahbālāhā—an election attended by no less than eight metropolitans and twenty-four bishops.[74] The political motivation for Yahbalāhā's elevation is made plain by his biographer: hailing as he did from Central Asian Turkic roots, he was familiar with the 'manners, customs, mode of government, and language' of the Mongol rulers of Iran.[75]

[68] Anonymous, *Taš̈īṯā*, 11ff (text), idem, *Histoire*, 70ff (trans.).

[69] The hagiographic elements of the *Biography* were first brought to light by Pier Giorgio Borbone in his commentary of anonymous, *Histoire*, 25–26 and further examined by Heleen Murre-van den Berg, 'The Church of the East in Mesopotamia in the Mongol Period', in *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, ed. Roman Malek (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006), 377–394, here 380–381, where she states: 'Holy places and persons play a major role in the book and one might even characterise the book as first and foremost a hagiography of both protagonists.'

[70] Pier Giorgio Borbone, 'A 13th Century Journey from China to Europe: The "Story of Mar Yahballaha and Rabban Sauma"', *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 31 (2008): 221–242, esp. 238. Here, Borbone argues that the two monks' granting of a *paiza*—a *laissez passez* issued to dignitaries of the empire—by Kublai Khan suggests that their journey from China to Mesopotamia was as much political as it was religious. Moreover, their warm reception by Ilkhanid and Church officials would not likely have occurred had they not been sent on official business by the Great Khan.

[71] Anonymous, *Taš̈īṯā*, 16 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 76 (trans.).

[72] ʿAmr ibn Mattā, *Akhbār faṭārikat kursī al–mashriq*, 123 (Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā's continuation). This detail is absent from Yahbalāhā's Syriac biography.

[73] Anonymous, *Taš̈īṯā*, 17 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 78–79 (trans.). Ṣalībā ibn Yuḥannā's continuation of the *Patriarchal History* (ʿAmr ibn Mattā, *Akhbār faṭārikat kursī al-mashriq*, 123), however, states that Mark was made Metropolitan of Tangut.

[74] Anonymous, *Taš̈īṯā*, 19–21 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 80–83 (trans.).

[75] Anonymous, *Taš̈īṯā*, 19 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 80 (trans.).

It was during Yahbalāhā's long reign that the Church of the East rendered another service to the Mongol Empire: Rabban Ṣawmā's diplomatic mission to the crusading powers of Europe on behalf of Ilkhan Arghun, in 1287–1288, in the hope of securing a military alliance against the Mamluks. The account was initially composed in Persian by the Visitor-General, and later translated into Syriac and incorporated into the biography of Yahbalāhā.[76] Rabban Ṣawmā was one of many figures present at the Mongol Embassy, and his role was arguably subordinate to that of other ambassadors—mainly Venetians and Genoese resident at the Ilkhanid court.[77] The focus of Rabban Ṣawmā's participation in the embassy is portrayed as being more religious than political by Yahbalāhā's biographer, who goes into great detail about the shrines and churches visited on his travels through Constantinople, Genoa, Tuscany, Bordeaux, and Paris.[78] During an audience with the cardinals of Rome, Rabban Ṣawmā was asked to prove his orthodoxy by producing a *confessio fide*, at which they expressed satisfaction. Upon further doctrinal questioning, however, the visitor-general is said to have politely demurred, stating that the true purpose of his long journey was to visit the city's holy sites and receive the Pope's blessings.[79]

Despite the goodwill experienced by Rabban Ṣawmā abroad, Yahbalāhā struggled to maintain relations with the court at home. The beginning of his patriarchate was marred by political controversy under the Ilkhan Aḥmad Tegüder (r. 1282–1284) after two bishops who resented Yahbalāhā's election implicated him in the murder of the *ṣāḥib al-dīwān* Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī, resulting in the catholicos's imprisonment. Although released shortly afterwards, the incident may have prompted Yahbalāhā to pursue closer ties to the Mongol *ordo* (royal camp) in order to secure his Church's interests. Thus, Rabban Ṣawmā commissioned the construction of the Monastery of Mār Mārī and Mār George in Marāgha, the Ilkhanid capital in Iranian Azerbaijan, which came complete with a special quarter (*qellāytā*) in which to receive the Ilkhan on official visits.[80] As to pre-existing places of worship in Marāgha, Yahabalāhā ordered that the church of Mār Shalliṭā be torn down and built anew at great expense.[81] Meanwhile, Rabban Ṣawmā was placed in charge of the tent-church of the travelling *ordo*. By the reign

[76] As the biographer himself informs us; Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 25 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 88–89 (trans.).

[77] See Pier Giorgio Borbone, 'Some Annotations on David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913*', *Hugoye* 6, no. 1 (2003): 157–158, here 158 *contra* Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East*, 16–17. Cf. Jean Richard, 'La mission en Europe de Rabban Çauma et l'union des Églises', in *Il Medio Oriente e l'Occidente nell'arte del XIII secolo* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1982), 162–167.

[78] Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 25ff (text); idem, *Histoire*, 88ff (trans.). See also Borbone, 'A 13th Century Journey from China to Europe', 127–237.

[79] Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 29–30 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 95–97 (trans.).

[80] Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 42 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 113 (trans.).

[81] Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 24 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 88 (trans.). On the churches of Ilkhanid Marāgha, see also Pier Giorgio Borbone, '*Marāgha mdittā arškitā*: Syriac Christians in Marāgha under Mongol Rule', *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 40 (2017): 109–143, here 114–118.

of Gaikhatu, the open-air lifestyle of the Ilkhanid court had taken its toll on Rabban Ṣawmā, who worked tirelessly to secure endowments for churches and monasteries across the realm. In 1294, the year of Rabban Ṣawmā's death, Yahbalāhā began work on the Church of John the Baptist, two miles north of Marāgha.[82] Whether ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, as one of the Church's highest-ranking figures, was ever present at the Mongol court is unclear. Perhaps the closest indication comes from the Armenian historian and Metropolitan of Siounik Stepannos Orbelian (d. 1305), who states that the Ilkhan Arghun urged him to bless a tent-church sent by the Pope to the *ordo* at Ala Dagh, where he found the 'Patriarch of the Nestorians' with twelve of his bishops.[83] Unfortunately, we cannot know for certain whether these bishops included ʿAbdīshōʿ.

There are, however, more concrete occurrences of ʿAbdīshōʿ in the church life of this period. The first is from a homily (*mēmrā*) in praise of Yahbalāhā, which appears at the end of a Gospel lectionary in a manuscript now held in the village of Karamlesh, Iraq. In it, Yahbalāhā's success at court certainly did not escape ʿAbdīshōʿ notice, for he notes that 'Kings brought him gifts,/Queens [made] offerings,/And emirs and sultans venerated him as if subjects'.[84] Neither were Yahbalāhā's church-building activities lost on ʿAbdīshōʿ, who in the same homily mentions the patriarch's founding of the monastery of John the Baptist; the renovation of the Church of Mār Shallīṭā in Marāgha; and—not mentioned in Yahbalāhā's biography—the renovation of Dāraṯ Rhōmāyē (Dār al-Rūm) in Baghdad, the traditional residence of the catholicos-patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.[85] Another text linking ʿAbdīshōʿ to Yahbalāhā is a *mēmrā* on the computation of paschal dates and other feast days, a genre known in Syriac as *ḥušbānā d-zaḇnē* (analogous to the Greek χρονικόν).[86] The text is addressed to one 'Amīn al-Dawla, the sublime leader' (*rēšānā mʿalyā*). It is likely that this 'Amīn al-Dawla' is not a proper name but an epithet (lit. 'the entrusted of the state'). Such titulature was regularly bestowed upon bearers of high office in the medieval Islamicate world, and given Yahbalāhā's closeness to the Mongol administration, such an honorific would seem entirely appropriate.[87]

[82] Anonymous, *Taš̈īṯā*, 42–43 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 113–115 (trans.).

[83] Stepannos Orbelian, *Histoire de la Siounie*, tr. Marie Félicité Brosset (Saint Petersburg: Imprimerie de Académie imperiale des sciences, 1864), 265–266. David Taylor ('Your Saliva is the Living Wine: Drink, Desire, and Devotion in the Syriac Wine Songs of Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē', in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule and Carmen Fotescu Tauwinkl [Leuven: Peeters, 2010], 31–51, here 47–48) believes that this event likely corresponds to Rabban Ṣawmā's return from his embassy to Europe in 1288, when Arghun summoned the Visitor–General to the *ordo* in order to publicly present the Pope's gifts to Yahbalāhā at Ala Dagh, where it is possible that the East Syrian priest Khamīs bar Qardāḥē composed one of his wine songs.

[84] Vosté, 'Memra en l'honneur de Iahballaha III', 172 (text), 174 (trans.).

[85] Vosté, 'Memra en l'honneur de Iahballaha III', 172–173 (text), 174–175 (trans.).

[86] Bar Brīkhā, *Ḥušbānā da–ḵrōnīqōn*, 84–93.

[87] Moreover, since the *mēmrā* concerns the computation of ecclesiastical dates, it is unlikely that the dedicatee in question was a secular member of the ruling class.

ʿAbdīshōʿ prefaces his *mēmrā* on computation with several lines of personal praise (*qullāsā d-parṣōpā*), addressing the patriarch alliteratively as the 'the writer of writings and the learned in letters that give wisdom to writers' (*l-sāprā d-seprē wa-spīr b-seprē mḥakmay sāprē*) and 'the knower who knows to know the knowledge of letters' (*yaddūʿṯānā d-yāḏaʿ l-meddaʿ seprē*).[88] From the available evidence, therefore, it would seem that ʿAbdīshōʿ's activities were largely restricted to scholarly pursuits and literary correspondence rather than political engagement with the Mongol court.

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A year after Bar Ṣawmā's death, the era of patronage and political favour—so vividly reconstructed in the biography of Yahbalāhā and celebrated in ʿAbdīshōʿ's praise poetry—would once again be rudely disrupted, though this time with more lasting effects. In 1295, civil war broke out between the Ilkhan Baidu and his cousin Ghāzān, who converted to Islam in a bid to secure support from the general Nawrūz and other Muslim members of the Mongol elite. Ghāzān's adoption of Islam marked the official conversion of the Ilkhanate. This process, however, was not instantaneous but rather the culmination of the Mongol elite's decades-long interaction with the predominantly Muslim populations of Central Asia and Iran.[89] Nevertheless, the year 1295 would prove a traumatic one for the empire's Christians, as non-Muslims became frequent targets for Nawrūz's forces in the disorder that accompanied Ghāzān's seizure of power. 'In the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjā', the Persian historian and vizier Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318) reports, 'By imperial command . . . the destruction of temples, Christian churches, and Jewish Synagogues was begun, and temples in which idols were housed,[90] clappers (*nawāqīs*), and crosses were entirely eliminated from the region of Azerbaijan.'[91] Similarly, Yahbalāhā's biographer reports that the order came from Nawrūz that 'churches should be uprooted and the altars overturned, and the celebrations of the Eucharist should cease, and the hymns of praise, and the [sounding of the] church clapper (*nāqōšā*) shall be abolished'.[92] Yahbalāhā, by now

[88] Bar Brīkhā, *Ḥušbānā da-ḵrōnīqōn*, 84.

[89] See Bundy, 'The Syriac and Armenian Christian Responses', 34. For a more detailed study of the Islamification of the Mongol elite as a gradual, assimilative process, see Judith Pfeiffer, 'Reflections on a "Double Rapprochement": Conversion of the Mongol Elite during the Early Ilkhanate', in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 369–389.

[90] The temples mentioned here refer to the Buddhist houses of worship that had flourished in parts of Iran during the reign of the early Ilkhans, particularly Arghun who showed a special reverence to the faith. During Ghāzān's rise to power, Buddhist *toyins* and *bakhshis* were offered the choice of either converting to Islam or returning to Kashmir, India, and Tibet. See Ronald E. Emmerick and Prods Oktor Skærvø, 'Buddhism', *EIr* 4 (1990): 492–505, here 498; Jackson, 'The Mongols and the Faith of the Conquered', 274–275.

[91] Faḍl Allāh ibn Abī al-Khayr Rashīd al-Dīn, *Rashiduddin Fazlullah's Jamiʿu't-tawarikh = Compendium of Chronicles: A History of the Mongols*, tr. Wheeler M. Thackston, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1999), 3:627.

[92] Anonymous, *Taššīṯā*, 44 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 117 (trans.).

old and infirm, was seized from his patriarchal palace in Marāgha, hung upside down, beaten, and later ransomed for 5,000 dinars.[93] Churches in the city such as Mār Shallīṭā were completely levelled, and had it not been for the intervention of the Armenian King Heʾtum II, who happened to be passing through the city that month, the church that Rabban Ṣāwmā built would also have been destroyed.[94] As for events outside Marāgha, the continuator of Barhebraeus's *Chronicle* reports that the Christians of Baghdad were forced to wear the *zunnārā*—a girdle fastened around the waste in times of prayer—as a mark of public humiliation and pay the *jizya*, a poll tax on non-Muslims obligated by Islamic law.[95] Furthermore, heavy bribes were extracted by Nawrūz's men from the Christians of Mosul, though their buildings were spared destruction.[96] A monk from the monastery of Mār Awgen mentions in a contemporary note in a Syriac lectionary that the 'demon-possessed Nawrūz' tortured the Catholicos Yahbalāhā and attacked churches and monasteries in the region over a period of six months.[97]

However, the violence committed during Ghāzān's coup was temporary and the attacks on non-Muslims mainly opportunistic. Following Ghāzān's consolidation of power, relations between the Ilkhanid state and its Christian subjects were normalized, especially after the execution of Nawrūz, his erstwhile ally and kingmaker, in 1297. It was after this time that Yahbalāhā was permitted to complete the construction of his beloved Monastery of St John the Baptist in Marāgha, where Ghāzān sojourned in 1303.[98] It also appears that Christian elites in the Jazīra continued to hold official positions. For we hear of a Christian governor of Mosul named Fakhr al-Dīn ʿĪsā ruling the city until falling out of favour with Ghāzān in 1302,[99] while a high-ranking Christian official in the administration of Āmid is reported to have visited Yahbalāhā at his monastery in Marāgha in 1304.[100] Nevertheless, occurrences of violence against Christians were not unknown during Ghāzān's reign, though these tended to be localized and

[93] Anonymous, *Taš̲īṯā*, 44–45 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 117–118 (trans.).

[94] Anonymous, *Taš̲īṯā*, 45 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 118–119 (trans.).

[95] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon*, 595–596 (text), idem, *Chronography*, 506–507 (trans.). On the *zunnār* and *jizya*, see Arthur S. Stanley, 'Zunnār', *EI²* 11 (2002): 571–572 and Claude Cahen, 'Djizya', *EI²* 2 (1965): 559–562. Other social and religious restrictions on non-Muslims stipulated by various applications of Islamic law will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this study.

[96] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon*, 597 (text.), Barhebraeus, *Chronography*, 508 (trans.).

[97] Dublin, Chester Beatty Syc. 704 (olim Mardin, Scher 8), 1r; French translation of this note in Scher, 'Manuscrits syriaques et arabes de Mardin', 66–67.

[98] Anonymous, *Taš̲īṯā*, 60–61 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 138–139 (trans.).

[99] Theresa Fitzherbert ('Religious Diversity under Ilkhanid Rule c. 1300 as Reflected In The Freer Balʿamī', in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff [Brill: Leiden, 2006], 390–406) has identified this Fakhr al–Dīn ʿĪsā as the patron to whom the Shīʿī historian Ibn Ṭiqṭaqā dedicated his *al-Fakhrī* in 1297, and by whom a luxury manuscript was commissioned in 1302. Although Rashīd al-Dīn draws attention to Fakhr al-Dīn's Christianity in an account of his demise, it seems unlikely that his execution by Ghāzān was religiously motivated. Ibid., 404–405.

[100] Anonymous, *Taš̲īṯā*, 62 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 140 (trans.). The official is unnamed.

sporadic cases. Such was the case in 1297 when the Jacobite bishop of Āmid was imprisoned and beaten and the Church of the Mother of God sacked and burnt to the ground during an uprising against the Artuqid ruler, Manṣūr Najm al-Dīn Ghāzī.[101]

It was not until the reign of Öljeitü (r. 1304–1316) that official attitudes towards the Christian subjects of the Ilkhanate would harden. Due to the influence of his Christian mother, Öljeitü was baptized Nicholas (possibly in honour of Pope Nicholas IV), embraced Buddhism in his youth, and later converted to Islam along with his brother Ghāzān, though to what extent these religious oscillations affected his relationship with the empire's Christians is unclear.[102] At any rate, the biography of Yahbalāhā describes a cooling between the Church and the court at the beginning of Öljeitü's rein, explaining that the Ilkhan received Yahbalāhā with polite courtesy but without the honour and affection of his predecessors.[103] Church–state relations would take a definite turn for the worse in 1310 following the rebellion of a Christian people known in Syriac as the *qāyāčīyē* at the citadel of Arbil. Pier Giorgio Borbone has convincingly identified this group as the Mäkrin, a Turko-Mongol tribe garrisoned at the citadel by Hülegü during his invasion of Mesopotamia, and who had remained there as permanent inhabitants.[104] Previous tensions between the *qāyāčīyē* and the city's Muslim inhabitants, particularly the Kurds, had flared up in 1289 and 1297 but were resolved between the Ilkhanid authorities and the Church.[105] But by the following decade, local Muslim resentment towards the *qāyāčīyē* grew to such a level that Öljeytü's ministers sought to permanently expel them from the citadel. Their refusal to leave, however, led to protracted negotiations between the court and a group of ecclesiastical representatives led by Joseph, metropolitan of Arbil, whom Heleen Murre-van den Berg has postulated as the author of Yahbalāhā's biography.[106] These negotiations would prove futile, however, and after a long and bitter siege by Ilkhanid forces, the citadel's Christian defenders were starved into defeat and massacred in their

[101] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon* 598–599 (text), idem, *Chronography*, 1:509 (trans.). Here the Artuqid ruler is referred to by his epithet 'al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ'.

[102] Although Öljeytü adopted a harder line against his Christian subjects, his policy towards the Mamluks and the empire's Armenian allies remained unchanged; see Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 110–111; Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks*, 181–183.

[103] Anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 63 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 141 (trans.).

[104] Pier Giorgio Borbone, 'Hülegü's Rock-Climbers: A Short-Lived Turkic Word in 13th–14th Century Syriac Historical Writing', in *Studies in Turkic Philology Festschrift in Honour of the 80th Birthday of Professor Geng Shimin*, ed. Zhang Dingjing and Abdurishid Yakup (Beijing: Minzu University Press, 2009), 285–291, here 293–294.

[105] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon*, 570–571 (text), idem, *Chronography*, 485–486 (trans.); anonymous, *Taš῾īṯā*, 52–56 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 127–133 (trans.).

[106] Murre-van den Berg, 'The Church of the East', 391–394, though as she points out, 'the identification is possible and perhaps even likely, but not proven'. Ibid, 393. For supporting evidence, see Pier Giorgio Borbone, 'L'autore della "Storia di Mar Yahballaha e di Rabban Sauma" ', in *Loquentes linguis Studi linguistici e orientali in onore di Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti*, ed. Pier Giorgio Borbone et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 104–108.

entirety, with further reprisals against the city's Christian population surrounding the citadel.[107]

The tragedy at Arbil is said have greatly disheartened Yahbalāhā, who could no longer rely on his presence at court to secure the welfare of his community. Retiring to his cell at his monastery in Marāgha, the catholicos resolved never to return to the *ordo*, exclaiming, 'I am weary of service to the Mongols!'[108] The Church's embattled position and diminished status must have been painfully evident to ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā by the time of Yahbalāhā's death in 1317, particularly during his participation at the election of Yahbalāhā's successor, Timothy II (formerly Joseph, Metropolitan in Arbil), in February the following year. Whereas thirty-one metropolitans and bishops were present at the election of Yahbalāhā in 1281, no more than eleven, including ʿAbdīshōʿ, were present at Timothy's in 1318.[109] Thus, given that much of ʿAbdīshōʿ's literary and ecclesiastical activity took place over the last quarter of the thirteenth century and the turn of the fourteenth, we can be sure that he had witnessed great tumult and upheaval in his lifetime. We should also note that ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics were composed in the latter half of the 1290s and the opening decades of the 1300s (as outlined in the previous chapter), at a time when Christians in the Ilkhanate were facing increasing hostility. Although he nowhere mentions contemporary events, it appears that he wrote his apologetics in response to heightened religious and political tensions.

2.4 The Intellectual Climate

From the eighth to tenth centuries, Christians in the Abbasid Empire played a key role in the transmission of the Greek sciences into Arabic, often through intermediary Syriac translations.[110] The role of Syriac Christians in this transmission was memorialized centuries later by the Muslim writers Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 1248) and

[107] The whole affair is detailed at length in Anonymous, *Taš̱īṯā*, 65–83 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 143–169 (trans.).

[108] Anonymous, *Taš̱īṯā*, 84 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 169 (trans.).

[109] Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis*, 3/1:568–569 (text),

[110] The issue has been one of some debate. Dimitri Gutas (*Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society [2nd–4th/8th–12th Centuries]* [London: Routledge, 1998], 20–22) asserts that the role of Syriac Christians in Greco-Arabic translations was secondary to that of Abbasid patronage—the real driving force behind the so-called Baghdad Translation Movement. However, Gutas's cursory treatment of Syriac Christian intermediaries greatly understates their contribution to Greco-Arabic translations. For an important corrective, see Jack Tannous, 'Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak', (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), 52ff. Here, Tannous convincingly shows that the Abbasid translation enterprise was the culmination of a Syriac Christian tradition that was grounded in late antique modes of paideia. Indeed, most of the Greco-Arabic translators in Baghdad were Syriac Christians—a fact well-remembered in later Arabic sources (see below in this section).

Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (d. 1270) in their accounts of scholars and physicians.[111] But despite the memory of such achievements, a rather different situation had emerged by ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's day. As we shall see in this section, Christians in the thirteenth century no longer enjoyed the same level of prestige as imparters of Hellenistic knowledge, though they were no less active in several walks of intellectual life. What follows is a sketch of some salient developments in the intellectual history of the Islamicate world during the centuries leading up to ʿAbdīshōʿ's career.

In addition to being Greco-Arabic translators, many Jacobite and Nestorians figured prominently among Baghdad's circle of Aristotelians, which included many important Muslim names such as Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950). Perhaps the most important name among al-Fārābī's Christian pupils was Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), whose theological works would have a profound impact on a generation of later Arabic Christian scholars as well as being a highly esteemed philosopher among Christians and Muslims alike. A circle of students from all faiths gathered around Ibn ʿAdī, the Christian members of which included Abū ʿAlī Naẓīf ibn Yumn (d. 990), Abū ʿAlī ʿIsā ibn Zurʿa (d. 1008), and Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043).[112] The latter's theological works would also have a significant influence on later thinkers.

The first real challenge to Baghdad as a centre of philosophy came from Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), known in the West as Avicenna. A native of Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan, Avicenna was uneasy with Baghdad's status as an uncontested seat of learning. He regarded the current curriculum of Neoplatonized Aristotelianism, inherited from the Alexandrian commentators of Late Antiquity, as dated and inadequate to the needs of current philosophers. In private correspondence, he expressed this frustration by attacking the 'simple minded Christians of Baghdad'.[113] As Dimitri Gutas has observed, Avicenna viewed contemporary philosophical practice as being too rigid in its Aristotelian classification of the sciences and over-reliant on the commentary tradition of the late antique Neoplatonists—a tendency he perceived in the activities of the Baghdad

[111] See Gérard Troupeau, 'Le rôle des syriaques dans la transmission et l'exploitation du patrimoine philosophique et scientifique Grec', *Arabica* 38 (1991): 1–10.

[112] For a survey of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's works and those of the Christian members of his circle, see Gerhard Endress, 'Die Bagdader Aristoteliker', in *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt. Bd. 1: 1. 8.–10. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Rudolph (Basel: Schwabe, 2012), 290–362, here 301–324, 325–333, 346–352. See more generally John W. Watt, 'The Strategy of the Baghdad Philosophers: the Aristotelian Tradition as a Common Motif in Christian and Islamic Thought', in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. Jan van Ginkel et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 151–165.

[113] See his letter to Kiyā in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (ed.), *Arisṭū ʿinda al-ʿarab: dirāsa wa-nuṣūṣ ghayr manshūra* (Kuwait: Wakālāt al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1978), 120; translated in Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 54.

philosophers of his day, many of whom happened to be Christian.[114] Chief among those whom Avicenna decried was Ibn al-Ṭayyib, whose medical writings, among other things, he severely criticized.[115] The scholarly rivalry between the two was such that Ibn al-Ṭayyib reportedly attempted to block Avicenna's access to his books by demanding an exorbitant price for them.[116]

At any rate, it was Avicenna who was to have the more lasting impact on the history of philosophy. His radical reworking of the Aristotelian curriculum had considerable implications on the philosophy of the rational soul, the modalities of necessary and contingent being, the classification of sciences, and the use of philosophy in Islamic theology.[117] The latter legacy has become a subject of much debate in modern scholarship. Until relatively recently, Western scholars saw the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* ('The Incoherence of the Philosophers') of the Ashʿarite theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) as the death knell of philosophy in the Islamicate world, inaugurating a long period of intellectual stagnation.[118] Al-Ghazālī's three main contentions were that the philosophers (i.e., Avicenna and more generally the Peripatetics) denied that the world had a beginning in time; claimed that God could only know things in a universal rather than a particular way; and maintained the impossibility of bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgement.[119] However, recent scholars have shown that al-Ghazālī's critique actually facilitated the entry of philosophy into Islamic *kalām*, as he himself was a keen advocate of the use of logic in theology, while aspects of his ontology and epistemology can be said to have Avicennian foundations.[120] Following al-Ghazālī's death there emerged what Jean Michot called an 'pandémie

[114] Gutas, *Avicenna*, 384. For Avicenna's opposition to the Christian philosophers of Baghdad on nature and motion, see H.V.B. Brown, 'Avicenna and the Christian Philosophers of Baghdad', in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented by his Friends and Pupils to Richard Waltzer on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Albert Hourani et al. (Oxford: Cassirer, 1973), 35–49. Avicenna's refutation of a text attributed to Porphyry (d. 305), and its implications on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, will be addressed in Chapter 4 of this study.

[115] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā, *Ibn Sina risâleleri*, ed. Hilmi Ziya Ülken, 3 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1956), 1:66–71.

[116] The incident is related in the memoire of Avicenna's student Ibn Zayla; see Gutas, *Avicenna*, 59ff.

[117] See Robert Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93–136, esp. 127–133,

[118] For articulations of this traditional view, see Solomon Monk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris: Franke, 1859); Ernest Renan, *Averroès et l'averroïsme: essai historique* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1852), 22–24, 133–36; Ignàc Goldziher, 'Die islamische und die judische Philosophie des Mittelalters', in *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Wilhelm Max Wundt (Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1909), 301–337, here 321.

[119] See Michael E. Marmura, 'al-Ghazālī', in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 137–154, here 143–145.

[120] On al-Ghazālī's creative 'camouflaging' of aspects of Avicennian thought in his mystical system, see Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* (London: Routledge, 2012), 103. On al-Ghazālī's role in naturalizing elements of philosophy in *kalām* more generally, see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Avicenniene', which marked out learned culture in the Islamicate world throughout the twelfth century.[121] Furthermore, Gerhard Endress has shown that by the first half of the thirteenth century, Avicenna's works had proliferated into the curricula of *madrasas* throughout the eastern Islamicate world.[122] This process was initiated during Avicenna's own lifetime, accelerated by al-Ghazālī, and consolidated by the later Ashʿarite thinker Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), whose synthesis of *kalām* and philosophy produced what Ayman Shihadeh has referred to as an 'Islamic Philosophy … that was not seen to conflict with religious orthodoxy'.[123]

These developments would come rather late in the Syriac Christian milieu of Syria and Upper Mesopotamia. Until the thirteenth century, Syriac philosophy remained rooted in the Alexandrian curriculum, which had percolated into the monastic centres of Syria and Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity. The *locus classicus* for this type of paideia tended to be commentaries on Aristotle and Alexandrian-style lectures and prolegomena. Among Syriac-reading Christians, this brand of Peripatetic thought—which has been characterized by recent scholars as 'Greco-Syrian' in nature[124]—endured well into the twelfth century, as suggested by a florilegium of commentaries on the *Organon* compiled by Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171).[125] This work exhibits little if any indebtedness to the Arabic tradition of its time. Rather, most of the authorities compiled by Bar Ṣalībī originate from the learned environment of several centuries earlier, namely that of the West Syrian Qenneshrē school of the sixth–eighth centuries. By the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, Syriac learned culture within the Church of the East also continued to rely on earlier traditions. A grammar by John bar Zōʿbī (fl. early

[121] Jean Michot, 'La pandémie avicennienne au VI^{e}/XII^{e} siècle: Présentation, *editio princeps* et traduction de l'introduction du *Livre de l'advenue du monde* (*kitāb ḥudūth al-ʿālam*) d'Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī)', *Arabica* 40, no. 3 (1993): 287–344.

[122] Gerhard Endress, 'Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa: Intellectual Genealogies in the Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East', in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Honour of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 372–422.

[123] Ayman Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology', *ASP* 15 (2005): 141–179, here 178.

[124] John W. Watt, 'Al-Fārābī and the History of the Syriac Organon', in *Malphono w-rabo d-malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, ed. George Kiraz (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 751–778, here 758–759.

[125] See Salam Rassi, 'From Greco-Syrian to Syro-Arabic Thought: The Philosophical Writings of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī and Jacob bar Šakkō', in *La philosophie en syriaque*, ed. Emiliano Fiori and Henri Hugganard-Roche (Etudes Syriaques; Paris: Geunther, 2019), 329–379. The unique manuscript containing Bar Ṣalībī's florilegium is Cambridge, University Library Gg 2.14, on which see William Wright, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 2:1008–1023.

thirteenth century), for example, exhibits the same fidelity to Greco-Syrian models inherited from Late Antiquity.[126]

During the first half of the thirteenth century, however, the situation began to change. The so-called Syriac Renaissance produced figures from the Syrian Orthodox community who were conversant—and in many cases reliant on—the legacies of Muslim thinkers such as Avicenna, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and others. Notable in this regard was Jacob bar Shakkō (d. 1241), a Jacobite monk who studied in Mosul under the Muslim philosopher and jurist Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Yūnus.[127] Julius Ruska and Hidemi Takahashi have highlighted the indebtedness to Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's minerology and meteorology of Bar Shakkō's *Kṯāḇā d-ḏīyālōgō* ('The Book of Dialogues').[128] The Patriarch of Antioch John bar Maʿdanī (d. 1263), a younger contemporary of Bar Shakkō, was also known for his familiarity with Arabo-Islamic literary forms and philosophical systems, having composed a Syriac poem modelled on Avicenna's famous *Ode to the Soul*.[129] Mention should also be made of the 'Copto-Arabic Renaissance' that burgeoned from the second half of the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries in Cairo and Damascus, where there existed a sizeable Coptic diaspora. Prominent in this regard were the ʿAssāl brothers—al-Asʿad (d. between 1253 and 1259), al-Ṣafī (d. after 1265), and al-Muʾtaman (d. between 1270 and 1286)—and Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Ṭayyib (fl. 1260s), all of whom composed extensive theological treatises in Arabic that critically engaged with various Islamic theological, legal, and philosophical currents.[130] Yet among Syriac Christians, the adoption of Arabo-Islamic models was piecemeal at first. Bar Shakkō only seems to employ an Arabic source where he believed a Syriac one to be lacking: in the logical section of his *Book of Dialogues*, for example, he employs much of the Greco-Syrian material that had come down to him from the late antique tradition. But when we turn to the metaphysics of the same work—for

[126] Farina, 'Bar Zoʿbī's Grammar'. In the passages of Bar Zōʿbī's grammar that she analyses, Farina identifies the Syriac adaptation of the *Téchne Grammatikè* of Dionysius Thrax (d. 90 BC); Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*; Proba's commentary on *Peri Hermeneias*; Paul the Persian's exposition of the last nine *Categories*; Porphyry's *Isagoge*; and Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and *Meteorologica*.

[127] On Bar Shakko's education, see Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, 3:409–12.

[128] Julius Ruska, 'Studien zu Severus bar Šakkû's *Buch der Dialoge*', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 12 (1897): 8–41, 145–161, here 145; Hidemi Takahashi, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Qazwīnī, and Jacob bar Shakko', *The Harp* 19 (2006): 365–379.

[129] See Ighnāṭyūs Afrām Barṣawm, *al-Luʾluʾ al-manthūr fī taʾrīkh al-ʿulūm wa-l-ādāb al-suryāniyya*, 4th ed. (Glane/Losser: Bar Hebraeus Verlag, 1987), 409–410 and Herman G.B. Teule, 'Yuḥanon bar Maʿdani', *GEDSH*, 444. For editions of Bar Maʿdanī's poem, see appendix to De Kellaita's edition of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Paradise*, 209–227 and John bar Maʿdanī, *Mēmrē w-mušḥāṭā*, ed. Yuhanna Dolabani, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Maṭbaʿṭā d-Dayrā d-Mār Marqōs, 1980), 16–19.

[130] Adel Sidarus, 'Le renaissance copte arabe du moyen âge', in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 311–340.

which Syriac sources were more wanting—we find an almost wholesale use of Arabic material, particularly from post-Avicennan philosophical *summae*.[131]

The Mongol conquests ushered in a new system of patronage that would set in place new opportunities for men of learning, thereby bringing Syriac learned culture closer to Islamic models. As mentioned earlier, the Ilkhans held a special reverence for the religious classes, which included members of the Muslim '*ulamā*' and Christian clergy. Thus, it was not unusual for the Mongols to spare the lives of such men during a siege, pressgang them into imperial service, and place them under royal patronage. The great Shī'ī polymath Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) is a notable example. After being taken captive during the fall of the last Isma'īlī stronghold at Alamut in 1254, he took his place as astronomer and advisor to Hülegü and would later set up a famous observatory and library at the Ilkhanid capital of Marāgha.[132] Around al-Ṭūsī grew an illustrious circle of philosophers, theologians, and scientists such as Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 1265), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 1311), Kamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn al-Fuwaṭī (d. 1323), and Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 1325).[133] Their activities took place during a rich period of cultural cross-fertilization between Iran and China under the aegis of Mongol rule.[134] Nor were these networks restricted to Muslims: another prominent thinker of the age was the Jewish Baghdad-based philosopher 'Izz al-Dawlā ibn Kammūna (d. 1284), who exchanged letters with Ibn al-Fuwaṭī and others.[135] Tabriz, the Mongol capital between 1265 and 1311, would also flourish as an important centre for learning. It is here that the

[131] Rassi, 'From Greco-Syrian to Syro-Arabic Philosophy', 362–363. For the period between the sixth century and the so-called Translation Movement, we have far greater evidence of Syriac translations and commentaries of Aristotle's logic than of his *Metaphysics*; see Daniel King, 'Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic)', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58, no. 1 (2013): 101–120, here 102. One reason for the focus on logical translations into Syriacin Late Antiquity, as opposed to other parts of the Aristotelian curriculum, was that philosophical paideia began with logic and therefore had to be more accessible to Syriac-reading novices. Meanwhile, latter parts of the Aristotelian curriculum such as the *Metaphysics* tended to be accessed in the original Greek, by students of a more advanced level. Later in the Abbasid period, Syriac translations of the *Metaphysics* were produced, but these were most likely intended for a Christian, Syriac-reading audience that was no longer familiar with Greek; John W. Watt, 'Why did Ḥunayn, the Master Translator into Arabic, make Translations into Syriac? On the Purpose of the Syriac Translations of Ḥunayn and his Circle', in *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750–1000 CE*, ed. Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2014), 363–388.

[132] See Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*, 213ff; George Saliba, 'Horoscopes and Planetary Theory: Ilkhanid Patronage of Astronomers', in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 357–368.

[133] On the lives of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī and others in the Marāgha Circle, see Devin Deveese, 'Cultural Transmission and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: Notes from the Biographical Dictionary of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī', in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11–29.

[134] Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83ff.

[135] Kamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majma' al-ādāb fī mu'jam al-alqāb*, ed. Muḥammad Kāẓim, 6 vols. (Tehran: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād al-Islāmī, 1416/1995–19996), 1:190–191. For Ibn Kammūna's works, see Sabine Schmidtke and Reza Pourjavady, *A Jewish Philosopher of Baghdad: 'Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) and his Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

Byzantine scholar and bishop Gregory Chioniades (d. 1320) translated al-Ṭūsī's influential astronomical work, the *Zīj īlkhānī*, into Greek.[136]

Pre-eminent among Syriac Christians who participated in the intellectual milieu of Mongol Iran was Barhebraeus. His story mirrors al-Ṭūsī's in that he was also co-opted into Mongol service. In 1260, while serving as metropolitan of Aleppo, Barhebraeus pleaded with the invading Mongol forces to spare the inhabitants of Aleppo, only to be imprisoned in the citadel of Qalʿat al-Najm for his troubles.[137] From there he was transported east to the Mongol court where he served as one of Hülegü's physicians, and was later appointed maphrian (exarch of the eastern provinces of the Jacobite Church) in 1265, due to his erudition, knowledge of languages, and closeness to the Mongol elite.[138] Despite the brutality he had witnessed in Syria, Barhebraeus flourished in the intellectual climate of Marāgha, stating in the preface to his *Chronography* that he made ready use of the library at the city's famous observatory.[139] It is therefore likely though not entirely certain that he knew al-Ṭūsī personally. We do know of Barhebraeus's interaction with other members of the Marāgha circle such as the astronomer Ibn Abī l-Shukr al-Maghribī (d. 1283), one of al-Ṭūsī's collaborators, from whom the maphrian requested a summary of Ptolemy's *Almagest*.[140] Barhebraeus engagement with the latest works of astronomy is further evinced in a surviving *ex libris* in a manuscript on the subject once housed in the library at Marāgha.[141] We also know of his good disposition towards non-Christian intellectuals from a report that he composed his *Taʾrīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal* ('Abridged History of Kingdoms') after his Muslim friends urged him to write an Arabic version of his Syriac *Chronography*.[142]

Barhebraeus's intellectual ties to his co-religionists under Mongol rule were no less strong. He maintained a learned correspondence with other educated ecclesiastical figures such as the East Syrian priest and wine poet Khamīs bar Qardāḥē, on the subject of whether God falls under the ten Aristotelian categories.[143] Khamīs also composed a lengthy praise poem to Barhebraeus, lauding the

[136] David Pingree, 'Gregory Chioniades and Palaeologan Astronomy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 134–160.

[137] Barhebraeus provides testimony of this himself; see Barhebraeus, *Chronicon*, 510 (text), idem, *Chronography*, 436 (trans.).

[138] Takahashi, *Bio-Bibliography*, 22–27.

[139] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon*, 4 (text), idem, *Chronography*, 1–2 (trans.).

[140] See Hidemi Takahashi, 'Barhebraeus: Gregory Abū al-Faraj', in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, ed. Virginia Trimble et al. (New York: Springer, 2007), 94–95.

[141] See Hidemi Takahashi, 'Bar 'Ebroyo, Grigorios', *GEDSH*, 54–56, here 55, fig. 14.

[142] As related by the continuator by Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, 3:469. See also Denise Aigle, L'oeuvre historiographique de Barhebraeus: son apport à l'histoire de la période mongole', *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 25–61, here 29.

[143] Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Mušḥāṯā* (Glane/Losser, Monastery of St Ephrem the Syrian, 1983), 157–159.

maphrian's leadership, intellect, and piety.[144] Barhebraeus is also known to have cultivated excellent relations with other members of the East Syrian hierarchy. His *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* speaks highly of Yahbalāhā III, who is said to have looked upon the Syrian Orthodox with great kindness.[145] When Barhebraeus passed away in Marāgha in 1286, the catholicos ordered the closure of all the city's shops and decreed a day of mourning. More Nestorians, Greeks, and Armenians are said to have attended the maphrian's funeral than members of his own community.[146]

The range and depth of Barhebraeus's theological and philosophical enterprise is truly impressive. Arguably, his most significant achievement was to create a new synthesis based on the latest advances by Muslim intellectuals and to make them accessible to a Syriac-speaking audience. His philosophical compendium entitled *Ḥēwaṯ ḥeḵmṯā* ('The Cream of Wisdom') is modelled closely on Avicenna's *Kitāb al-shifāʾ* ('Book of Healing')[147] as well as important post-Avicennan philosophical compendia such as the *Mulakhkhaṣ fī al-manṭiq wa-l-ḥikma* ('The Summary of Logic and Philosophy') of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.[148] As for Barhebraeus' ecclesiastical works, the structure of his theological encyclopaedia, the *Mnāraṯ quḏšē* ('Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries'), follows that of works by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and other *kalām* scholars.[149] He also undertook a translation of Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* ('Pointers and Admonishments').[150] Barhebraeus's practical philosophy owes much to al-Ṭūsī's *Akhlāq-i nāṣirī*,[151] and his *Ethicon*, a spiritual work, draws as much from al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* ('Vivification

[144] For the Syriac text and Russian translation, see Anton Pritula, 'Khāmīs bar Kardākhē, vostochnosirijskij poet kontsa XIII v.', *Simbol* 61 (2012): 314–317.

[145] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, 3:451–453.

[146] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, 3:473–476.

[147] Hidemi Takahashi, 'The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac: The Case of Gregory Barhebraeus', in *Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*, ed. David Reisman and Ahmed Al-Rahim (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 249–81, here 253.

[148] On the *Posterior Analytics* of Barhebraeus' *Cream of Wisdom*, which draws almost exclusively from the post-Avicennan Arabic tradition, see Jens Ole Schmitt, 'Barhebraeus's Analytics: Medical Analytics', in *The Letter before the Spirit: The Importance of Text Editions for the Study of the Reception of Aristotle*, ed. Aafke M.I. van Oppenraay and Resianne Fontaine (Leiden: Brill, 2012). 131–157.

[149] Herbert Koffler, *Die Lehre des Barhebräus von der Auferstehung der Leiber* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1932), 28; Paul-Hubert Poirier, 'Bar Hebraeus sur le libre arbitre', *Oriens Christianus* 70 (1986): 23–26, esp. 33; Takahashi, 'Reception of Islamic Theology among Syriac Christians,' 172–173. Barhebraeus also notes the importance of Fakhr al-Dīn in his Arabic chronicle; see Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Taʾrīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal*, ed. Anṭūn Ṣāliḥānī (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1992), 254.

[150] The translation remains unedited and bears the Syriac title *Kṯāḇā d-remzē wa-mʿīrānwāṯā*; see Herman G.B. Teule, 'The Transmission of Islamic Culture to the World of Syriac Christianity: Barhebraeus' Translation of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-išārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*', in *Redifining Christian Identity. Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. Jan van Ginkel et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 167–184.

[151] Mauro Zonta, *Fonti greche e orientali del' Economia di Ba-Hebraeus nell' opera 'La crema della scienza'* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1992).

of the Religious Sciences') as it does Christian authorities.[152] As for the exact sciences, his work on astronomy entitled *Sullāqā hawnānāyā* ('The Ascent of the Mind') falls under the influence of al-Ṭūsī's *Tadhkira fī ʿilm al-hayʾa*, among other sources.[153]

If Barhebraeus' writings are anything to go by, the 'pandémie Avicenniene' had made considerable inroads into the thought-world of the Syrian Orthodox Church by the second half of the thirteenth century. As such, it is unsurprising that Barhebraeus readily expresses admiration for the achievements of Muslim thinkers, despite the central role played by Syriac intellectuals during the so-called Translation Movement in Baghdad in previous centuries. Reflecting on recent developments by Muslims in all branches of the sciences, Barhebraeus states in his *Chronography* that whereas the Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*) had once received knowledge from the Syrians (*suryāyē*) through the translators, it was now the Syrians who were forced to seek wisdom from the Arabs.[154]

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What can we say of ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's interaction with the thinkers of his day? First, we have no proof that ʿAbdīshōʿ was active in the scholarly circles of Marāgha and Tabriz, despite having lived under Ilkhanid rule. From what evidence we do have, we may surmise that his literary activities were based solely in the Jazīra region and within the confines of his ecclesiastical province of Nisibis. A note in a manuscript now kept in Jerusalem places ʿAbdīshōʿ in the Monastery of Mār Michael of Tarʿīl outside Mosul in 1279/89.[155] A manuscript containing his Arabic profession of faith, copied from an autographed exemplar, informs us that ʿAbdīshōʿ completed the work in 'the beginning of Rabīʿ al-awwal of the year 689 (= March 1290) at his episcopal cell (*qillāya*) in Nisibis'.[156] We also find ʿAbdīshōʿ at the northern extremities of the See of Nisibis according to a colophon in a Berlin manuscript in which he is said to have completed the *Pearl* in 'the city of Khlāṭ at the church of the blessed Nestorians' in 1297/8.[157] The same work would later be copied there in 1300 according to the colophon of another manuscript.[158] The latest date we possess for ʿAbdīshōʿ's activities comes from the

[152] Herman G.B. Teule, 'Barhebraeus' Ethicon, al-Ghazâlî and b. Sînâ', *Islamochristiana* 18 (1992): 73–86. On Barhebraeus's 'Christianization' of aspects of al-Ghazālī's thought, see also Lev E. Weitz, 'Al-Ghazālī, Bar Hebraeus, and the "Good Wife"', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 2 (2014): 203–223.

[153] Takahashi, *Bio-Bibliography*, 97, n. 364.

[154] Barhebraeus, *Chronicon*, 98 (text), idem, *Chronography*, 92 (trans.).

[155] Jerusalem, Saint Mark's Monastery 159, 106r. The sixteenth–century author of the note tells us that he saw (*ḥzēt*) ʿAbdīshōʿ's holograph of this book, in which the date of composition is given as 1591 A.G. See also discussions above in Section 2.1 and Chapter 1, Section 1.3.3.

[156] See Alphonse Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, 1933–1938), 1:146.

[157] See Sachau, *Verzeichniss*, 1:312.

[158] Jean-Baptiste Chabot, 'Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques de la Bibliothèque nationale acquis depuis 1874', *Journal Asiatique* 8, no. 9 (1896), 234–290, here 263.

aforementioned Jerusalem manuscript, which tells us that he composed his *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements* in 1315/16 at his episcopal cell in Nisibis (*b-qellāyṯā da-Nṣībīn mḏī[n]ttā*).[159]

There is no indication that ʿAbdīshōʿ interacted with scholars beyond his immediate ecclesiastical circles. A commentary he wrote on an enigmatic poem by the East Syrian author Simon Shanqlāwī (fl. first half of the thirteenth century) is addressed to a priest (*qaššīšā*) named Abraham, about whom we know nothing else.[160] Similarly, his *Paradise of Eden* and *Pearl* were composed at the request of the catholicos Yahbalāhā III, as we learn from his prefaces to these works.[161] We have already noted ʿAbdīshōʿ's rhetorical attack on Arabic literature in his *Paradise of Eden* and his frustration towards unnamed Arabs who denigrate the Syriac language. In a similar vein, in his preface to the *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements*, he polemicizes against 'outsider scholars' (*yallīpē d-ḇarrāyē*, presumably Muslims) who claim that the Christians are without an authentic law code of their own.[162] ʿAbdīshōʿ's borrowing from Islamic jurisprudence is likewise minimal, unlike Barhebraeus who relied heavily on Islamic models in his *Nomocanon*, particularly in the realm of family law. As Lev Weitz has demonstrated, this was perhaps because '[s]ince the early Abbasid period, East Syrian bishops had been actively engaged in producing legal texts and developing a communal legal tradition'. The West Syrian legal tradition, on the other hand, 'was not sufficient for the kind of comprehensiveness that Bar ʿEbroyo typically sought in his writings, so he turned to the textual resources of Islamic law as an alternative'.[163] Thus, feeling relatively free to operate outside Islamic paradigms, ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote his *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements* as an expression of independence from external models.

ʿAbdīshōʿ's engagement with alchemy, on the other hand, tells a very different story. As we noted above (Section 2.2), ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote his preface to a pseudo-Aristotelian treatise on the 'Art' while bishop of Sinjār. Here, our author mentions how the ancient sages served the kings of their time with the noble sciences of logic, medicine, mathematics, geometry, music, astrology (*nijāma*), and talisman-making (*tiliṣmāt*). In like fashion, ʿAbdīshōʿ saw fit to place his treatise on alchemy before the 'high throne (*al-takht al-ʿālī*) of our lord and master, the King of Kings' as an act of wise service (*ka-l-khidma al-ḥikmiyya*).[164] It is unclear exactly who

[159] Jerusalem, Saint Mark's Monastery 159, 106r; see also Kaufhold, introduction, xxi.

[160] ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, *ʿŌniṯā d-Mār Šemʿōn d-Šanqlāband d-pašqāh Mār(y) ʿAḇdīšōʿ mītrāpōlīṭā d-Ṣōḇā wa-ḏ-Armānīyā*, Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana sir. 187, 2v.

[161] *Paradise*, 3. [162] *Ṭukkāsā*, 2:26–4:1–5 (text); 3:32–5 :1–5 (trans.).

[163] Lev E. Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 344. For a comparison of ʿAbdīshōʿ and Barhebraeus' legals works, see ibid., 234–243. For earlier scholarship on Barhebraeus' use of Muslim sources in his *Nomocanon*, see Alfonso Nallino, 'Il diritto musulmano nel Nomocanone siriaco cristiano di Barhebreo', *Rivista degli studi orientali* 9 (1921–23): 512–580.

[164] Bar Brīkhā, *Tafṣīr*, 2r–3r.

this unnamed 'King of Kings'. But given that the Nestorian bishop Ḥnānīshōʿ once provided alchemical services to the Ilkhan Hülegü, it is more than likely that the earthly sovereign mentioned in ʿAbdīshōʿ's preface was a Mongol ruler. Unclear still is whether ʿAbdīshōʿ's work on alchemy was elicited by this king or was simply dedicated to him. At any rate, ʿAbdīshōʿ's mediation of this alchemical treatise is our strongest indication of his involvement in a non-ecclesiastical, 'profane' science.[165]

The alchemical text itself casts further light on ʿAbdīshōʿ's engagement with the broader intellectual trends of his day. The *Epistle on Alchemy* (*Risālat fī al-ṣināʿa*) purports to be an epistle on the elixir by Aristotle written to his student, Alexander the Great. In his preface to the work, ʿAbdīshōʿ claims that the text is based on a lost Greek original by Aristotle's own hand (*nuskha bi-khaṭṭ Arisṭāṭalīs*) translated into Syriac by an otherwise unknown John the Monk (*Yūḥannā al-rāḥib*) in 937 A.G. (= 625/6 CE).[166] Working from John's alleged Syriac version of this work, ʿAbdīshōʿ states that he translated (lit. 'clarified') it into Arabic (*raʾaytu an . . . ūḍiḥahā jāliyan bi-l-lisān al-ʿarabī*).[167] While there were in indeed translations of Greek alchemical texts into Syriac and later Arabic,[168] ʿAbdīshōʿ's claim is arguably a literary topos common to Arabic works on occult subjects. Typically, authors of this genre would allege that their works were translations from 'ancient' languages such as Syriac, Greek, or Byzantine (*rūmī*), presumably in order to lend their works an air of venerability.[169] Moreover, many of the *Epistle*'s principles resemble those common to works of Arabic alchemy, namely its sulphur–mercury

[165] The categories of 'secular' and 'religious' were known to Christians in the pre-modern Islamicate world, though not in the same sense as today. In medieval Syriac Christian discourse, there existed an epistemological distinction between 'ecclesiastical sciences' (*yulpānē ʿedtānāyē*) and 'profane sciences' (*yulpānē barrāyē*). The former could include subjects pertaining to ecclesiastical instruction such as Biblical exegesis and theology—as opposed to subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, geometry, or, indeed, alchemy. On this distinction in the thirteenth century, see Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1898), 104–106; idem, Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Ethicon: seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebræi*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1898), 116–118. For other Syriac Christian authors who employed this distinction, see Rassi, 'From Greco-Arabic to Syro-Arabic Thought', 355–356.

[166] Bar Brīkhā, *Tafṣīr* fol. 1v–8r.

[167] Bar Brīkhā, *Tafsīr*, 2v.

[168] On which see See Alberto Camplani, 'Procedimenti magico-alchemici e discorso filosofico ermetico', in *Il tardoantico alle soglie del Duemila: diritto, religione, società: atti del quinto Convegno nazionale dell'Associazione di studi tardoantichi*, ed. Giuliana Lanata (Pisa: ETS, 2000), 73–98; Benjamin Hallum, 'Zosimus Arabus: The Reception of Zosimus of Panopolis in the Arabic/Islamic World' (PhD diss., Warburg Institute, 2008).

[169] Rassi, 'Alchemy in the Age of Disclosure' 568–571. On this topos in alchemical writing, see Julius Ruska, *Tabula smaragdina: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg: C. Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1926), 69–79; Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 166–167, 219; Regula Forster, *Das Geheimnis der Geheimnisse: die arabischen und deutschen Fassungen des pseudo-aristotelischen Sirr al-asrār, Secretum secretorum* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 2006), 52; idem, 'Alchemy', *EI*^{3} 2 (2016): 15–28, here 16–17.

theory of metals; its list of animal substances (or 'stones') for the making of the elixir; and its recipe for making luting clay (or 'Clay of Wisdom').[170]

With that said, research on this text remains in its infancy, and so the precise nature of what ʿAbdīshōʿ alleges to be his translation must remain speculation for now. Nevertheless, our author's involvement in Arabic alchemy—a science practiced beyond the confines of his Church[171]—suggests a hitherto overlooked level of engagement with the broader intellectual environment of his day.

Conclusions

Having surveyed the available evidence, what can be said about ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's life that has not been said before? Regrettably, we are no closer to discovering his place of birth, though it was likely somewhere in the Jazīra. ʿAbdīshōʿ also remains largely absent from the available narrative and biographical sources of the period. This leaves us in the dark about any direct engagement he might have had with other actors—political and intellectual—of his day. His presence in Church life is nevertheless attested in several Syriac treatises, namely his own, in which we occasionally catch a glimpse of his early life and interaction with other East Syrian figures. Unlike his older contemporary Barhebraeus, ʿAbdīshōʿ seems to have had little direct involvement in the intellectual milieus of Marāgha and Tabriz. Instead, his literary activities appear far more parochial, confined as they were to the geographical hinterlands of his ecclesiastical see. But while ʿAbdīshōʿ does not appear to have been invested in the post-Avicennan philosophy that so occupied the mind of Barhebraeus, he was nevertheless knowledgeable of Arabic alchemy and its attendant literary genres and conventions.

As to the background of his apologetic theology, composed between 1297 and 1313, these appeared at a time when the political fortunes of the Church of the East were in steady decline. The official conversion of Ghāzān to Christianity and the hardening of the Ilkhanate towards Christians may have moved ʿAbdīshōʿ to write in defence of the faith. While this background provides us with some sociohistorical context, the remaining chapters of this study will demonstrate how the content of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics formed part of a continuous intellectual and catechetical tradition that emerged from Christianity's earliest encounters with Islam.

[170] See Rassi, 'Alchemy in the Age of Disclosure', 571–583 for an analysis of these theories and procedures as they appear in the *Epistle*.

[171] For alchemy in thirteenth-century Syria and Iraq, see N. Peter Joosse, 'Unmasking the Craft': ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī's Views on Alchemy and Alchemists', in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. Anna Akasoy and Wim Raven (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 302–317; Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Jawbarī, *Kitāb al-Mukhtār fī kashf al-asrār*, in Manuela Dengler and Humphrey Davies, *The Book of Charlatans* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 147–179.

3

The One is Many and the Many are One

ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian Thought

Our main sources for ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian thought are his *Pearl, Durra*, and the *Farāʾid*, and to a lesser extent his *Khuṭba* and *Profession*. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Trinity in medieval works by Syriac and Arabic Christian writers constitutes what Sydney Griffith has termed a 'primary topic', among others that affirmed 'the unity of the one creator God, and the Trinity of persons, or *hypostases*, in the one God'.[1] Concerns about Muslim attacks on the integrity of the Trinity's monotheism gave rise to a markedly apologetic agenda in systematic theologies written by Arabic-using Christian thinkers. The earliest of these sought to convince a Christian readership that their belief in God's triune nature could not be impugned by Muslims who would accuse them of espousing a form of associationism (*shirk*).[2]

The anti-Trinitarian agenda in the opening centuries of Islamicate history was arguably set in the Qurʾān by such verses as Q 5:73 ('Certainly they disbelieve who say: God is the third of three (*thālith thalātha*), for there is no god except one God') and 4:171 ('So believe in God and his messengers and do not say "Three" … For God is one God, far removed is He in his glory to have a son'). Such testimonia were often used by Muslim writers to level claims of tritheism against Christians.[3] This, in turn, prompted a generation of Arabic-speaking Christian theologians in the early Abbasid period—most notably the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra, the Jacobite Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rāʾiṭā al-Takrītī, and the Nestorian ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī—to respond to such accusations by adapting the teachings of the Greek and Syriac Church Fathers to a new set of cultural and religious circumstances.[4] The discourse of these early-Arabic Christian writers emerged in reaction to—if not in tandem with—the Islamic discipline of *kalām*, particularly with regard to discussions about the Godhead's relationship with the Word and Spirit as being one of

[1] Sydney H. Griffith, 'Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām', 3.

[2] The earliest surviving apologetic exposition of the Trinity in Arabic is known from its modern edition as *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (usually translated by modern scholars as 'On the Triune Nature of God'), dated between 755 and 788. See Mark N. Swanson, '*Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*', *CMR* 1 (2009): 330–3.

[3] David Thomas, 'Trinity', *EQ* 5 (2006): 369–372, here 369. Specific anti-Trinitarian attitudes of medieval Muslim theologians will be discussed in Section 2.2, below.

[4] For a detailed analysis and contextualization of the Trinitarian theology of all three of these writers, see Husseini, *Early Christian–Muslim Debate on the Unity of God*.

Christian Thought in the Medieval Islamicate World: ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition. Salam Rassi, Oxford University Press. © Salam Rassi 2022. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192846761.003.0004

divine attributes.[5] Such approaches laid the foundation for further developments in Trinitarian theology by later Abbasid writers, most notably Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 973), Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. ca. 1043), and Elias bar Shennāyā (d. 1046), to whom ʿAbdīshōʿ demonstrates a considerable degree of indebtedness,[6] though he rarely names his sources.

The apologetic agenda of ʿAbdīshōʿ's discussions of the Trinity is made explicit throughout his works. He concludes his *Pearl* by declaring, 'Let the heathen (*ḥanpā*, i.e., the Muslim), then, and Jews who rail against the truth of the Catholic Church, on account of its belief in the Trinity, be confounded and put to shame.'[7] ʿAbdīshōʿ's preamble to the *Durra*'s chapter on the Trinity contains a far lengthier rebuke to unnamed critics of the doctrine:

> I am greatly astonished by people of religions and doctrines (*ahl al-adyān wa-l-madhāhib*) that differ from Christians regarding principles and branches, and contradict them concerning revelation and law, at how they slander them because of their doctrine of threeness (*tathlīth*) in the Creator, which preserves with it the doctrine of true unicity (*tawḥīd*), and declare that the Christians worship three separate Gods and profess three different or identical lords (*thalāthat arbāb mukhtalifa aw muttafaqa*), or profess multiple essences (*kathrat al-dhawāt*) [in God], or believe in more than a single cause for existents (*ʿilla wāḥida li-l-mawjūdāt*), without reflection, investigation, verification, and examination.[8]

Following this statement, ʿAbdīshōʿ gives what appears to be a paraphrase of the famous Muslim theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī that 'finding fault with doctrines before comprehending them is absurd, nay, it leads to blindness and error'.[9] The end of the *Farāʾid*'s chapter on the Trinity also makes references to unnamed adversaries of the doctrine, concluding, 'This, O people, is what the Christians believe concerning the necessity of [God's] unicity while professing [His] threeness, not the associationism (*shirk*) and unbelief (*kufr*) of which the slanderers accuse them.'[10]

In this chapter, I will examine the apologetic strategies that ʿAbdīshōʿ employs to vindicate the doctrine of the Trinity. Focus will be given to two issues which feature prominently throughout his writings on the topic: (i) the existence of God as a unitary and incorporeal creator; and (ii) the discussion of God's attributes and

[5] Husseini, *Early Christian–Muslim Debate on the Unity of God*, 30–39.

[6] This has been noted in passing by Teule, "Abdisho' of Nisibis', 760, but is yet to be systematically explored.

[7] *Pearl*, 10.

[8] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 2–7.

[9] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 8. This quotation from al-Ghazālī has been discussed in Chapter 1. Unlike the preface of the *Farāʾid*, where al-Ghazālī is mentioned by name, ʿAbdīshōʿ simply refers to his source as *baʿḍ min al-ʿulamāʾ* ('one of the sages').

[10] *Farāʾid*, ch. 5, § 31.

their relation to the Trinitarian hypostases and divine names (referred to hereafter as the 'attribute apology').[11] As will become clear, it is necessary to consider his Trinitarian thought as part of a broader strategy of systematic theology that had become well-established by the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In line with earlier writers of the Church of the East and other Christian confessions, ʿAbdīshōʿ's aim is to inculcate the basic tenets of the Trinity to a Christian audience by systematizing centuries of doctrine in epitomes like the *Pearl, Durra*, and *Farāʾid*. ʿAbdīshōʿ also applied these strategies in his *Khuṭba*, a shorter, homiletic work, and the *Profession*, a brief credal statement. Yet underlying ʿAbdīshōʿ's didacticism is a markedly apologetic agenda. Muslim and, to a lesser extent, Jewish objections to the Trinity are never far from his mind, as was the case in earlier Christian Arabic and Syriac authors writing in an Islamicate milieu. Even the Trinitarian theology of the *Pearl*—written in Syriac and thus unlikely to be read by Muslims—bears the mark of an embattled doctrine, as has already been seen from the above references to non-Christian objections.

A further feature of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian thought is its regular appeals to philosophical reasoning. In line with some of the first known Christian theologians to write in Arabic, ʿAbdīshōʿ appeals to Aristotelian forms of expression, namely the distinction between substance and accidents to demonstrate the immutability of God and the consubstantiality of His hypostases. The Aristotelianism inherited from the Abbasid-era Baghdad Peripatetics looms large in this respect. Prominent among the Christian members of this circle were Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), his pupil, the Jacobite Abū ʿAlī ibn Zurʿa (d. 1008), and the Nestorian Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043). As we shall see in this chapter, these figures' apologetic strategies lie at the centre of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian thought.[12]

Furthermore, ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian dogma resonates to some degree with the technical language of Muslim *kalām* and *falsafa* concerning the relationship between God and creation—a subject in which Syriac and Christian Arabic discussions about the Trinity were invariably framed. As outlined in the previous chapter, Greek-inspired philosophical reasoning had become increasingly pervasive among Muslim theologians by the thirteenth century, due in great part to the legacy of the Ashʿarī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his critical revision of Avicennism, a project arguably initiated by al-Ghazālī. As Robert Wisnovsky has

[11] I borrow the term 'attribute apology' from Hussein, *Early Christian–Muslim Debate on the Unity of God*, 181ff.

[12] Herman G.B. Teule ('Reflections on Identity: The Suryoye of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Bar Salibi, Bar Shakko, and Barhebraeus', *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, no. 1–3 [2009]:179–189, here 182, n. 12) has argued that the legacy of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and other earlier Arabic Christian writers had become 'entirely forgotten in the later tradition of the Suryoye'. While it could be said that earlier Christian writers like Ibn ʿAdī were not often explicitly acknowledged during the so-called Syriac Renaissance, their legacy can nevertheless be detected, at least in the writings of ʿAbdīshōʿ and other Christian Arabic authors of the period, as I will show in this chapter.

shown, post-Avicennian *mutakallimūn*, Sunnī and Shīʿī alike, became 'entirely comfortable with appropriating and naturalizing Avicenna's analysis of God as necessary of existence in itself'.[13] Christian intellectuals in the Islamicate world were also prepared to use such formulations in their theories of God, as is evident from Barhebraeus's proof of a Necessary Being (*ʾālṣāy ʾīṯūṯā*) from the contingency of created beings—a discussion which eventually leads to his exposition of the Trinity.[14]

But while there are certainly turns of Avicenna-inspired phraseology in ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarianism, his authority ultimately rests on earlier ecclesiastical sources, patristic and Baghdad Aristotelian. For just as Christian writers living in Islamic lands valued the legacy of the ancient Church Fathers, so too did they consider the ideas of Christian Aristotelians as foundational. As set out in Chapter 1, it is chiefly *these* modes of authority that inform ʿAbdīshōʿ's catechetical project. And as David Thomas has pointed out, for medieval Christian writers to borrow too heavily from Muslim theological systems was to 'deny that theirs had integrity and completeness'.[15] ʿAbdīshōʿ's engagement with non-Christian models, then, is cautious and selective. With that said, to conceive of Christian engagement with Muslim *kalām* as a case of 'borrowing' is, I believe, incorrect. While it is true that medieval Christian and Muslim theologians were often at cross purposes over issues like the Trinity, the intention of Christian Arabic and Syriac apologists was never to justify dogma by 'borrowing' from outside of their theological systems. Rather, it was to negotiate common ground with Muslim critics by using a theological idiom that conformed to shared paradigms of reason while imparting to a Christian audience key points of dogma, much of which predated the advent of Islam altogether.

It is in this spirit—as much catechetical as it is apologetic—that ʿAbdīshōʿ expounds his Trinitarianism. Where sources are cited by name, they are usually of Christian provenance and patristic in origin. Moreover, Muslim critics of the Trinity are never named, and it is difficult to get a sense of how contemporaneous the criticisms to which he reacts are. As will be shown, it is likelier that the attacks to which ʿAbdīshōʿ responded were arguments that had become long-established polemical topoi over the centuries leading up to his time.

[13] Robert Wisnovsky, 'One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2004): 65–100, esp. 90–100. For the trend which 'ushered in a sophisticated philosophical theology in which the metaphysics of God as a Necessary Existent who produces a contingent world was incorporated into a theology of divine nature' among later Shīʿī scholars, see Sajjad Rizvi, 'The Developed *Kalām* Tradition: Part II: Shīʿī Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008), 90–96, esp. 93.

[14] Barhebraeus's Trinitarian theology will be treated in more detail below.

[15] Thomas, 'Christian Borrowings from Islamic Theology', 141.

3.1 Some Salient Objections to the Trinity

Before delving into ʿAbdīshōʿ's writings, it is necessary to explore the types of anti-Trinitarian criticism to which he responds. Although space does not permit us to account for them all, it is worth considering some of the most salient criticisms he had in mind. The polemical themes addressed in this chapter are (i) the claim that the Trinity multiplies God's essence; (ii) the failure of the attribute apology to affirm God's essential unity; (iii) the opaque nature of Trinitarian terminology, which complicates rather than affirms God's oneness; and (iv) the absence of any revealed authority for the Trinity.

The Christian convert to Islam Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā al-Mutaṭabbib (d. ca. 1163 or 1193) begins his refutation of the Trinity with the premise that the hypostases imply either (i) three essences co-equal (*mutasāwiya*) in knowledge, power, and wisdom; or (ii) three essences differentiated in rank (*mutafāḍila*). If co-equal, then a superfluous rank is supplied by the one (*kāna mā zāda ʿan al-wāḥid faḍlan ghayr muḥtāj ilayhi*), and thus the existence of each would have no meaning (*mā lā maʿnā fī wujūdihi*), which is inconceivable for both generated and pre-existent beings. If differentiated in rank, on the other hand, then the essences would know and be capable of some things but not others, resulting in one or more becoming deficient (*nāqiṣ*).[16] Turning to the Nicene Creed's statement that the Son is of the same substance as the Father, he questions how the Christians differentiate the one from the other. If they say that they are detached from one another (*infaṣalā*), then they have admitted composition (*tarkīb*) in the divine essence. And if the Christians mean that the Father and Son are co-eternal, then the former is not prior to the latter in time, thus committing Christians to the belief in the world's eternity (*qidam al-ʿālam*).[17] Lastly, al-Mutaṭabbib criticizes the Christians for claiming that the hypostases are attributes and properties. If, he asks, God is unlimited and the attributes are three, why, then, can He not possess a fourth?[18]

Nor did the Christians' attribute apology escape the notice of the famous Jewish thinker Maimonides (d. 1204), who mentions the doctrine in his influential *Dalālat al-ḥa'irīn* ('Guide for the Perplexed').[19] In this work, Maimonides attacks the division—often drawn by Christian theologians (as we shall see in Section 3.3)—between essential attributes and attributes of action. He begins by defining belief (*iʿtiqād*) as not simply an uttered concept but a concept

[16] Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā al-Mutaṭabbib, *al-Naṣīḥa al-imāniyya fī faḍīḥat al-milla al-naṣrāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh al-Sharqāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwa, 1406/1986), 63.

[17] Al-Mutaṭabbib, *al-Naṣīḥa*, 64.

[18] Al-Mutaṭabbib, *al-Naṣīḥa*, 65.

[19] The Christian reception of Maimonides has been far better understood in its medieval Latin European context, while its Arabic Christian reception—particularly in its Copto-Arabic environment—has only recently come to light; Gregor Schwarb, 'The Reception of Maimonides in Christian-Arabic Literature', in *Maimonides and his World: Proceedings of the Twelfth Conference of the Society for Judeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. Yosef Tobi (Haifa: A. Stern, 2014), 109–175.

represented in the soul.[20] This mode of belief, he continues, requires one to acknowledge that God possesses no essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyya*) in any way, since this would be at odds with His incorporeity. Thus, any who say that 'God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips and assume plurality in their thoughts' (*wāḥid bi-lafẓihi wa-ʿtaqadahu kathīrīn bi-fikratihi*), much as Christians 'who say that He is one and three and that the three are one'.[21] In order to speak of God in any meaningful way while preserving His transcendental reality, Maimonides circumscribes two types of attributes: negative attributes, which describe what God is not, since nothing is similar to Him; and attributes of action, which allow us to say something about the effects of divine agency without reference to His essence.[22]

A later Jewish thinker and near-contemporary of ʿAbdīshōʿ, the Baghdad-based philosopher ʿIzz al-Dawlā Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284), places the Trinity under scrutiny in his *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-milal al-thalāth* ('Investigation of the Three Religions')—a work that provoked a response from a Christian in Mardin named Ibn al-Maḥrūma (active in 1299; died before 1355).[23] In this critical appraisal of the three major faiths, Ibn Kammūna characterizes the Trinity as comprising the hypostases of the Essence, Power, and Knowledge, each corresponding to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively.[24] If one of these is an essence and the remaining two attributes, Ibn Kammūna avers, then surely God must be capable of generating a fourth.[25] Ibn Kammūna also addresses the Christians' explanation of the three hypostases as being akin to God in their being an abstract intellect (*ʿaql mujarrad*), which is both an intellecter (*ʿāqil*) and an intelligible (*maʿqūl*) of Itself. As we shall discuss in more detail below, this theory was first articulated in an explicitly Trinitarian context by Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, whom Ibn Kammūna mentions by name.[26] Against this, Ibn Kammūna asserts that even if this conception of God could be applied to the Trinity, it would contradict

[20] See discussion in Chapter 1 for comparable definitions of belief among Christian and Muslim writers.

[21] Mūsā ibn Maymūn, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Maṭbaʿat Jāmiʿat Anqara, 1974), 114–116 (text), idem, *The Guide of the Perplexed, Volume 1*, tr. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 67 (trans.), 111.

[22] Ibn Maymūn, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, 136–145 (text), idem, *The Guide*, 135–143 (trans). See also Joseph A. Buijs, 'Attributes of Action in Maimonides', *Vivarium* 20, no. 2 (1989): 83–102; Caterina Belo, 'Muʿtazilites, al-Ashʿarī and Maimonides on Divine Attributes', *Veritas* 52, no. 3 (2007): 117–131.

[23] Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Maḥrūma, *Ḥawāshī Ibn al-Maḥrūma ʿalā Kitāb tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth li-Ibn Kammūna*, ed. Habib Bacha (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Būlusiyya, 1984).

[24] Saʿd ibn Manṣūr ʿIzz al-Dawlā ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth*, ed. Moshe Perleman (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 52 (text), idem, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths*, tr. Moshe Perleman (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 80 (trans.). As we shall see below, in the usual Christian Arabic scheme, the three persons are called Existence (and sometimes Essence), Power, and Knowledge, among other threefold formulae; see table of Arabic Trinitarian terms in Rachid Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes: 750–1050* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 232–233.

[25] Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 54 (text), idem, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination*, 83 (trans.).

[26] Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's articulation of this theory will be discussed below, Section 3.2.2.

the statement that the Son is differentiated from the Father by the fact that it was the Son who descended and rose as opposed to the Father.[27] On Ibn Kammūna's view, therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity falls short of affirming God's essential oneness, on the one hand, while failing to adequately differentiate His attributes, on the other.

The Ashʿarite theologian and Mālikī judge Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 1285) would similarly find fault with Trinitarian terminology. In his monograph on al-Qarāfī's *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ʿan al-asʾila al-fājira* ('Fitting Responses to Shameful Answers'), Diego Cucarella has shown that some of the Cairene jurist's criticism of the Trinity arose from the Christians' definition of God as a substance (*jawhar*).[28] As we shall see further in this chapter, medieval Christian Arabic apologists often employed the Aristotelian distinction between accident and substance to demonstrate how God fell under the latter, since He is self-subsistent and contingent on no other being than Himself. Al-Qarāfī responds with an Ashʿarite understanding of the term *jawhar* as an 'atom', that is, a single unit of created reality that occupies a physical space but does not admit division (*mutaḥayyiz li-dhātihi alladhī lā yaqbalu al-qisma*); an accident (*ʿaraḍ*), meanwhile, is that which requires (*muftaqir*) a substance in which to subsist (*yaqūmu bihi*) but which owes its existence to God rather than the substance.[29] According to al-Qarāfī, what the Christians mean by their definition of substance and accident is the distinction between contingent (*mumkin*) and necessary (*wājib*) beings, which the terms *jawhar* and *ʿaraḍ* do not adequately convey.[30]

A briefer refutation of Christianity entitled *Adillat al-waḥdaniyya fī radd al-naṣrāniyya* ('Proofs of Divine Unity in Refutation of Christianity')—attributed to al-Qarāfī by its modern editor though more likely the work of one Burhān al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍāʾil al-Iskandarānī (d. 1249)[31]—challenges its Christian interlocutor's scriptural proofs for the Trinity. Here, al-Iskandarānī examines the Christians' claim that God's words in Gen 1:26—'Let us make mankind in our image

[27] Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 56 (text), *Ibn Kammūna's Examination*, 85 (trans.). Ibn Maḥrūma (*Ḥawāshī*, 200–201) counters this assertion by arguing that ascent and descent are only applied to the Father metaphorically (*bi-l-istiʿāra*). He further reasons that the Jews themselves are committed to a metaphorical understanding of descent, since the Torah states that 'God came down to see the city and the tower' (Gen 11:5) and 'Let us go down and there divide their languages' (Gen 11:7).

[28] Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim–Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean*, 136–137.

[29] Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfī, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ʿan al-asʾila al-fājira*, ed. Bakr Zakī ʿAwaḍ, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987/1408) 153. For a similar distinction between *jawhar* and *ʿaraḍ* in a Classical Ashʿarite refutation of Christianity, see Richard M. Frank, 'Bodies and Atoms: the Ashʿarite Analysis', in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 39–53. On the later development of the concept of *jawhar* by the Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn*, see idem, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 48–55; Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 4–18.

[30] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 154; Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim–Christian Polemics*, 137.

[31] The author of the *Adilla* dedicates his refutation to the Ayyūbid sultan al-Mālik al-Kāmil (d. 1238). The fact that al-Qarāfī was born in 1228 makes his authorship of the work highly doubtful. See Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, 'Al-Qarāfī', *CMR* 4 (2012): 582–587, here 584.

according to our likeness'—are proof of His triune nature, since the use of the first person plural points to God's resemblance (*tashbīh*) to Creation and a plurality (*jamʿ*) of His persons, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[32] In response, the author asserts that God's use of the first person in Gen 1:26 is simply the 'royal we' (*nūn al-ʿaẓma*), just as a king might refer to himself in the first person plural when addressing his subjects.[33] Moreover, according to al-Iskandarānī, God's statement about likeness is not literal (*lā yaḥmilu ʿalā ẓāhira fī al-tashbīh*). Rather, what God meant by the expression 'our likeness' is that humankind was created 'according to Our attribute' (*ʿalā ṣifatinā*), that is, the seven divine attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) of God most commonly affirmed by the Ashʿarites: Living, Knowing, Willing, Able, Hearing, Seeing, and Speaking.[34] If God were to share a true likeness with mankind, He would be subject to corporeal attributes such as smell, taste, and movement—all of which is absurd for a transcendent and unitary being.[35]

In addition to Muslim representations of the Trinity in polemical works, invocations of the doctrine could also be found in legal rulings during ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime. We find such a case in a *fatwā* by the Damascene jurist Ibn Taymiyya against the Mongols, even despite their official conversion to Islam in 1295. Here, Ibn Taymiyya claims that they believed Chinggis Khan to be 'Son of God (*ibn Allāh*), conceived from a beam of the sun, similar to what the Christians believe about Christ'.[36] What is referred to here—and no doubt exaggerated for polemical effect—is the common Trinitarian analogy that likens the relationship of the Father to the Son and the Word to the warmth radiated by the sun. Rooted in biblical imagery, variations of this analogy were frequently employed by the Church Fathers and later the Christian authors of the Abbasid period and beyond.[37]

Ibn Taymiyya's more systematic criticisms of Christian doctrine are contained in his *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala al-dīn al-masīḥ* ('The Correct Response to those who have Changed the Religion of Christ'). The crux of the *Jawāb*'s argument against the Trinity is that the doctrine defies reason, even by the

[32] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya fī al-radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Saʿīd Dimashqiyya (Riyadh: n.p., 1407/1988), 27. For this exegesis of Gen 1:26 in Christian sources, see the final section of this chapter.

[33] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 71.

[34] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 71–72. On these seven attributes, see Nader El-Bizry, 'God: Essence and Attributes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 121–140, here 128.

[35] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 72.

[36] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥ adītha, 1385–1386/1965–1966), 4:339, quoted and translated by Judith Pfeiffer, 'Confessional Ambiguity vs. Confessional Polarization: Politics and the Negotiation of Religious Boundaries in the Ilkhanate', in *Politics, Patronage, and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 129–169, here 158–159.

[37] See Michał Sadowski, *The Trinitarian Analogies in the Christian Arab Apologetic Texts (750–1050)* (Cordoba; Beirut: CNERU-CEDRAC, 2019), 60–61, 71, 109–110, 115–116.

parameters of logic set by the Christians themselves. He examines, for example, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's definition of the three distinct hypostases as attributes existing in a single substance (*jawhar*) just as 'Zayd [exists as] the doctor, the accountant, and the scribe'.[38] This statement is roundly dismissed by Ibn Taymiyya, who asserts that an attribute cannot 'be equal to what is described of the substance' (*mutasāwiya li-l-mawṣūf al-jawhar*), since each attribute describes something that the other does not. This, in turn, obligates the Christians to confess three substances and three Gods.[39]

Ibn Taymiyya also takes issue with his Christian interlocutor's inability to establish scriptural proof for the existence of hypostases in God's indivisible essence. He takes, for example, the claim of the anonymous author of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus* that Mat 28:19 ('Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit') is proof of the three hypostases.[40] In reply, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that this interpretation is attested nowhere by the prophets, who are not known to have employed the term 'Son' for any of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*), either literally or metaphorically (*lā ḥaqīqatan wa-lā majāzan*). How, then, can 'Son' in this context be interpreted as the hypostasis of knowledge (*ʿilm*) and God's Word (*kalām*) when such a reading is neither evident in the Old Testament nor the Gospels?[41] Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya draws attention to what he regards as the inability of Christians to agree on the definition of 'hypostasis' and to identify *which* of the attributes constitute the three persons, varying as they do in number. He takes as examples such threefold variations as 'Existence, Knowledge, Life'; or 'Wisdom, the Word, and Power' (*al-qudra*)—all of which he encounters in different writings, but none of which Christian authors seem to agree on.[42] That Trinitarian terminology lacks uniformity and coherence is further underlined by what Ibn Taymiyya (mistakenly) takes to be the Byzantine Greek (*rūmiyya*) origin of the word *uqnūm* or *qunūm*,[43] which the Christians translate variously as 'foundation' (*aṣl*), 'individual' (*shakhṣ*), 'attribute' (*ṣifa*), and 'property' (*khāṣṣa*).[44] To this effect, Ibn Taymiyya concludes

[38] Taqī al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. ʿAlī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir, 7 vols. (Riyad: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1419/1999), 3:231–232, quoted in Platti, 'Towards an Interpretation', 62–63. See also extracts translated in idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-sahih*, Thomas F. Michel (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), here 271.

[39] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:323 (text), Michel, *A Muslim Theologian*, 171 (trans.).

[40] Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas (ed. and tr.), *Muslim–Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's Response* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 94 (text), 95 (trans.).

[41] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:258. This passage is translated in Basanese, *Réponse raisonable*, § 45.

[42] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:260 (text), Basanese, *Réponse raisonable*, § 46 (trans.).

[43] The term *uqnūm* is actually derived from the Syriac *qnōmā*, as will be discussed below, in Section 3.3.2.

[44] On the fluidity of this term, see Landron, *Attitudes*, 170ff; Bo Holmberg, '"Person" in the Trinitarian Doctrine of Christian Arabic Apologetics and its Background in the Syriac Church Fathers', in *Studia Patristica Vol. XXV. Papers presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1991*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 300–307.

with the witticism, 'Well spoke the virtuous one who said, "If ever you ask a Christian, his son, and the son of his son what it is they believe, each one's belief will differ from the other!"'[45] As in other critiques of the Trinity surveyed above, Ibn Taymiyya also affirms the absurdity of limiting the number of the hypostases to only three (*takhṣīṣ al-ṣifāt bi-thalātha*), since both the Bible and the Qur'ān attest to rather more than three divine attributes.[46]

3.2 Proofs of God's Existence and Uniqueness

Having enumerated some relevant criticisms of the Trinity, we now turn to ʿAbdīshōʿ's attempts to overcome these challenges. All three of his major dogmatic works—the *Pearl*, the *Durra*, and the *Farāʾid*—begin by establishing the existence of God as (i) an agent of creation; (ii) an incorporeal entity; and (iii) a unified being. Thus, before launching into a discussion of the Trinity, ʿAbdīshōʿ first establishes the simple premise that Christians believe in a unitary, incorporeal God who is the single cause of creation.

The first argument he makes to this effect is a teleological one—more specifically, an empirical argument from the composition and orderliness of the created universe. Indeed, the first statement of the Nicene Creed declares there to be 'one God, the Father almighty, and Creator of all things'.[47] Thus, the notion of God's uniqueness and creative agency was a theme in Christian–Muslim controversy but also a foundational issue in Christian dogmatics more generally.

ʿAbdīshōʿ's second argument is proof of God's self-knowledge, which determines the divine essence to be an incorporeal being, possessing three self-emanatory states: Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible—a triad often equated with the three hypostases. As will be argued in this section, the purpose of these proofs in ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic scheme was to reassure Christians that their idea of God was not at variance with the idea of His transcendence. To achieve this, he draws on a technical idiom common to both Christian theology and aspects of Islamic *kalām* and *falsafa*.

[45] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:260–261 (text), Basanese, *Réponse raisonable*, § 46 (trans.). A similar statement is made by Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Mukhtār fī al-radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbbās al-Sharqāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwa, 1984), 95.

[46] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:261(text), Basanese, *Réponse raisonable*, § 51 (trans.).

[47] For Syriac and Arabic versions of this part of the Creed, see Elias bar Shennāyā, *Elias of Nisibis: Commentary on the Creed/Tafsīr al-Amānah al-Kabīrah*, ed. and trans. Bishara Ebied (Cordoba; Beirut: CNERU-CEDRAC, 2018), 84 (text), 85 (trans.): *mhaymnīn b-ḥaḏ ʾalāhā ʾaḇā ʾaḥīḏ kol*; *nuʾminu fī al-wāḥid Allāh al-ab alladhī fī qabḍatihi kull shayʾ*.

3.2.1 Teleological Arguments: Composition, Motion, and Mutual Interference

The *Pearl, Durra*, and *Farāʾid* all make some form of teleological argument that can be summarized as follows: since the created order exhibits complexity and arrangement, it must have had a creative agent. And since composition and arrangement entail a process of bringing together mutually destructive elements, the agent of this process must itself be unitary and unchangeable in essence. The argument is an ancient one, with origins in Greek works such as the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, which contains an early iteration of the argument from composition, positing that if nature is made up of four mutually antipathetic elements (i.e., earth, fire, water, and air), then a being beyond the elements must have compelled them together.[48] However, while the *De Mundo* posited the eternity of the heavens, later Christian authors would deploy the argument from composition with the entire universe's finitude in mind, such as we find in the Syriac *Book of Treasures* of Job of Edessa's (fl. ninth century).[49] Another example of the argument from composition is Theodore Abū Qurra's discourse on the Creator. Here, Theodore begins by considering how an invisible God might be comprehended through natural phenomena. Acknowledging that the universe exhibits composition, he observes that that 'everything that is composed, its parts are prior to it in nature' (*kull mā rukkiba ajzāʾuhu asbaq minhu bi-l-ṭabīʿa*). These parts, in turn, are composed of four elements that are contrary in nature and so cannot be their own cause of composition. For example, water extinguishes fire, while air inclines upwards and earth downwards. Thus, a being of a prior and different nature to those contrary elements must have compounded them, otherwise the position and stability of the world could not be maintained.[50] As we shall see presently, such teleological and cosmological inferences of God's existence from the world's createdness were common to both Christian and Muslim theological systems.[51]

We begin with the *Pearl*'s argument for the world's composition by a First Cause. Early in the work's chapter on the Trinity ʿAbdīshōʿ makes the following statement:

[48] Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*, 393a1–9, 396a26–31, cited and discussed in Herbert Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 146–153.

[49] Job of Edessa, *Encyclopædia of Philosophical and Natural Sciences as Taught in Baghdad about AD 817; or, Book of Treasures*, ed. and tr. Alphonse Mingana (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1935), 15 (trans.), 304 (text). See also Hans Daiber, 'Possible Echoes of *De mundo* in the Arabic-Islamic World: Christian, Islamic and Jewish Thinkers', in *Cosmic Order and Divine Power: Pseudo-Aristotle,* On the Cosmos, ed. Johan Thom (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 169–180, here 174.

[50] Theodore Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawīm*, ed. Ignatius Dick (Jounieh: al-Maktaba al-Būlusiyya, 1982), 183–188.

[51] See William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1979) and Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 239–240.

> That the world is created (ʿ*bīḏā*) and had a temporal beginning (*b-zaḇnā šqal šurrāyā*) is proved thus: this world is composed (*mrakḇā*)—as a whole and in all its parts—arranged (*mlaḥmā*), and framed (*mṭaksā*). Thus, everything that is composed, arranged, and framed possesses a composer, arranger, and framer (*ʾīṯ leh mrakḇānā wa-mlaḥmānā wa-mṭaksānā*).[52]

ʿAbdīshōʿ further explains that because the universe is comprised of mutually oppositional powers and elements, their composition could not have come about naturally. Thus, if creation is to be understood as composition, and composition cannot occur of itself, then an external agent is required—an almighty (*mṣē ḥēl kol*) being who overcame (*ḥsan*) things that are naturally destructive to each other and gathered them into a single harmony (*la-ḥḏā ʾawyūṯā kanneš*).[53] The *Durra*'s argument from composition follows a similar line of reasoning. Here, ʿAbdīshōʿ begins by discussing modes of speculation (*naẓar*) that lead to knowledge of God's existence, despite His being simple (*baṣīṭ*) and unknowable through the senses.[54] The first is by contemplating effects (*mafʿūlāt*) in the world.[55] As in his *Pearl*, he affirms the basic idea that

> an effect must undoubtedly emanate from a cause; conceptualisation from a conceiver; composition from a composer (*al-tarkīb ʿan al-murakkib*); arrangement from an arranger (*al-tartīb ʿan al-murattib*); that the world is composed and arranged; and every composite and arranged thing is originated (*muḥdath*) and acted upon (*mafʿūl*) and has an agent (*fāʿil*).[56]

However, so far ʿAbdīshōʿ has only told us that composition in the universe necessitates the existence of a composer. It remains for him to explain why the agent of this process must be one in number. He does this through what might be termed an 'argument from mutual interference', which posits that if more than one First Cause existed, they would be beset by rivalry and thus creation would fail to occur. The strategy is traceable to the ancient Greek *Corpus Hermeticum*[57] and gradually made its way into the thought of Syriac and Christian Arabic writers by way of patristic sources.[58] In his *Pearl*, ʿAbdīshōʿ establishes the oneness and incorporeity of this First Cause by considering the existence of two or more

[52] *Pearl*, 3–4. [53] *Pear*, 4. [54] *Durra*, ch. 4 § 13. [55] *Durra*, ch. 4 § 14.
[56] *Durra*, ch. 4 § 15–20.
[57] Walter Scott (ed. and tr.), *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which Contain Religious and Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1:217.
[58] Harry Austryn Wolfson (*The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, 49–50) and Herbert Davidson (*Proofs*, 166) each trace the argument of mutual interference to John of Damascus as well as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. For Arabic Christian examples of the argument of mutual interference, see ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, *al-Masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba*, in Michel Hayek. *Kitāb al-burhān wa-Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1977), 100–102; Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, *Maqāla fī al-tawḥīd*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir (Jounieh: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyya, 1980), § 30–43; Abū Naṣr Yaḥyā

creators alike in nature (*da-ḵyānā nehwōn šwēn*). This is dismissed on the grounds that it is impossible to conceive of 'two blacknesses alike in every respect' (*tartēn ʾukkāmwāṯā da-ḇ-ḵol meddem šawyān w-lā prīšān*).[59] He then considers the possibility of two creative forces of separate natures (*prīšīn men ḥḏāḏā ba-ḵyānā*). As before, this statement is rejected, this time on the grounds that two different agents cannot participate in a harmonious order of creation, since they would be mutually oppositional and destructive (*saqquḇlāyē kēṯ wa-mḇaṭlānē da-ḥḏāḏē*). ʿAbdīshōʿ then applies this argument of mutual interference to his interpretation of Deut 6:4 ('The Lord God is One God').[60]

ʿAbdīshōʿ's combines his theory of mutual interference with an argument for the world's origination in time. In his *Pearl*, he sets out the basic premise that time is the reckoning of bodily motion (*menyānā [h]w mettziʿānwāṯā d-ḡušmē*). Having previously established that bodies are created through composition, ʿAbdīshōʿ posits that this composer must also be the creator of time.[61] In his *Durra*, meanwhile, he states that God is a cause of motion (*al-muḥarrik li-l-ḥ arakāt*) due to the impossibility of eternal motion (*al-ḥarakāt ilā ghayr nihāya*) and an infinite regress of contingent beings (*silsilāt al-mumkināt ilā ghayr ghāya*).[62] Once denying the impossibility of eternal motion (and hence eternal time), ʿAbdīshōʿ asserts that if an unmoved and incomposite being were multiple in number, existence would descend into mutual destruction and contradiction (*talāshā taʿānudan wa-taḍāddan*).[63] 'When there is multiplicity (*kathra*)', our author concludes, 'there is chaos (*mirā*), and thus order (*niẓām*) cannot be established.'[64]

Similarly, in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Farāʾid*, the world's finitude is argued from the composition and moveability of the heavens. The heavens, reasons ʿAbdīshōʿ, must be finite (*mutanāhiya*) because they are determined (*muqaddara*) by the movements of the planets, which are divided into constellations, sublunary spheres, and elements. If everything determined by movement is divided into finite parts (*maqsūma ilā ajzāʾ mutanāhiya*), then the heavens must be finite (*mutanāhī*) and temporally originated (*muḥdath*).[65] The implication here is that if the parts are created then so too is the whole—a strategy evocative of John Philoponus's (d. 570) inference of the entire universe's temporal origin from the finitude of every one of its bodies.[66] Finally, affirming the oneness of the originator (*muḥdith*) with

ibn Jarīr, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid ilā al-falāḥ wa-l-najāḥ al-hādī min al-tīh ilā sabīl al-najāt*, Oxford, Pococke 253, 5v; al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Fī dhāt al-Bāriʾ taʿālā* wa-awṣāfihi *qabla al-ittiḥād*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 3, §§ 4–35, here 31.

[59] *Pearl*, 5. [60] *Pearl*, 6. [61] *Pearl*, 6. [62] *Durra*, ch. 4 § 21.

[63] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 25. [64] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 26. [65] *Farāʾid*, ch. 4, § 7.

[66] John Philoponus, *Philoponus: Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*, tr. Christian Wildberg (London: Duckworth, 1987); Davidson, *Proofs*, 66. Here, Philoponus infers from Aristotle's Physics 8, 10 that since the heavens are subject to motion, they must be a limited body and possess a limited capacity (δύναμις/*quwwa*), and nature as a whole must be limited and its motion provided for by a cause of unlimited capacity. For Christian Arabic fragments of this argument transmitted by Abū al-Khayr al-Ḥasan Ibn Suwār (d. after 1017) and al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, see John Philoponus,

the Qur'ānic pronouncement that God 'possesses no equal' (*lā sharīka lahu*, Q 6:163),[67] ʿAbdīshōʿ rejects the notion of there being two creators alike in will, since creation requires the ability to overcome multiplicity. For if two co-consentaneous wills existed, one would be unable to overcome the other (*lā yumkin aḥaduhum an yaqhara al-ākhar*).[68] As in the *Pearl* and the *Durra*, ʿAbdīshōʿ rejects this notion on the basis that if two creators of unequal power and will existed, chaos and discord would ensue and thus creation would not be possible (*lā yaṣuḥḥu ʿanhu al-khalq*).[69] In sum, the implication of the argument against an infinite cosmos—alongside those he makes from composition and against mutual interference—is that the First Cause must be an unchangeable (*lā yataghayyar*) and motionless (*thābit*) existent that is necessary for being (*mawjūd ḍarūrī al-wujūd*).[70]

Another way in which ʿAbdīshōʿ posits the existence of a Creator is by advancing macro- and microcosmic theories of the physical order, which were rooted in Hellenistic and patristic thought and had a long reception history in the Church of the East and other Syriac churches.[71] For example, the anonymous eleventh-century West Syrian author of the theological *summa* entitled *ʿEllaṯ kol ʿellān* ('Cause of all Causes'), after having considered the marvels of nature in the macrocosm (*ʿālmā rabbā wa-rwīḥā*), concludes that 'just as I have established and recognised that I have a constant lord, maker, and provider, so too does this great and vast [cosmos] have a lord'.[72] Such theories held that certain patterns exhibited at all levels of the cosmos must necessarily be reflected in man and vice versa. As ʿAbdīshōʿ states in his *Farāʾid*:

Maʿānī al-maqālāt al-thalāth, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 4, §§ 5–35, here § 6; Bernard Lewin, 'La notion de *muḥdaṯ* dans la kalām et dans la philosophie. Un petit traité inédit du philosophie chrétien Ibn Suwār', *Orientalia Suecana* 3 (1954): 84–93, here 91. Philoponus's arguments against the world's eternity also enjoyed an early reception in the Syriac churches; see Richard Sorabji, 'Infinity and the Creation', in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. Richard Sorabji (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2010), 207–220; Joel Thomas Walker, 'Against the Eternity of the Stars: Disputation and Christian Philosophy in Late Sassanian Persia', in *Convegno internazionale La Persia e Bisanzio: Roma, 14–18 ottobre 2002* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 509–537, esp. 523–527; Christian Wildberg, 'Prologomena to the Study of Philpponus' *contra Aristotelem*', in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. Richard Sorabji (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2010), 239–250, here 240.

[67] *Farāʾid,* ch. 4, § 28. [68] *Farāʾid*, ch. 4, § 23. [69] *Farāʾid*, ch. 4, § 25.

[70] *Durra*, ch. 4 § 22.

[71] For macrocosmic and microcosmic theories in Plato, Aristotle, and the Church Fathers, see George Conger, *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), 7–36. For these theories in the sixth-century East Syrian author Michael Bādōqā and his influence on the thirteenth-century liturgical poet George Wardā, see Gerrit J. Reinink, 'Man as Microcosm. A Syriac Didactic Poem and its Prose Background', in *Calliope's Classroom: Studies in Didactic Poetry from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Annette Harder et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 123–152; idem, 'George Warda and Michael Badoqa', in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule and Carmen Fotescu Tauwinkl (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 63–74.

[72] Anonymous, *Das Buch von der Erkenntniss*, 33–34 (text), 43–44 (trans.).

> If one of two identical things is judged by a certain judgement, insofar as one is identical to the other, then it must follow that that judgement apply to the other. The world is spoken of in two ways: macrocosm (*al-ʿālam al-akbar*), which is the entirety of the heavens, earth, and [everything] between; and the human being, which is the microcosm (*al-ʿālam al-aṣghar*), according to what the Ancients have explained. It is evident that the microcosm, which is the human being, possesses an agent and creator. So, then, does it follow for the macrocosm, and thus, [the universe] possesses a maker and a creator.[73]

As noted in the beginning of this section, teleological arguments for God as First Cause were upheld by Muslim theologians. The *mutakallimūn* of the Ashʿarite and Muʿtazilite traditions each adduced a number of arguments in support of the claim that the existence of a Creator can be ascertained from the physical world's finitude and composition.[74] Moreover, important figures in the history of *kalām* such as al-Juwaynī (d. 1085) and his disciple al-Ghazālī affirmed the createdness of the world *ex nihilo* based on arguments resembling those of John Philoponus, whose proofs against eternalism had entered into Islamic theological and philosophical currents as early as the ninth century.[75] As for the doctrine of mutual interference, this become known as *tamānuʿ* among Islamic theologians, many of whom found support for the notion in such Qurʾānic verses as Q 21:22[76] and Q 23:91,[77] though the efficacy of this proof in establishing a single creative cause was disputed by some.[78] As we will see below (in Section 3.3.1), micro- and macrocosmic theories of man were also commonplace among medieval Muslim thinkers.

However, that the world had a beginning in time was far from universally accepted. In the first three Islamic centuries or so, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theologians often marshalled teleological arguments against eternalists or 'materialists' (*dahriyya*).[79] From the early twelfth century onwards, Muslim theologians

[73] *Farāʾid*, ch. 4, §§ 16–17.

[74] For comprehensive surveys of these authors and their natural theological doctrines of God, see Davidson, *Proofs*, 213–236; Binyamin Abrahamov, introduction to *al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence = Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr*, ed. and tr. Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1–60.

[75] Joel L. Kraemer, 'A Lost Passage from Philoponus' *Contra Aristotelem* in Arabic Translation', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85, no. 3 (1965): 318–327; Davidson, *Proofs*, 86–116; Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 19ff; Robert Wisnovsky, 'Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī', *EI²* 9 (2001): 252.

[76] 'If gods other than God had been in them (the heavens and earth), then surely they would have been ruined' (*la-fasadatā*).

[77] 'God has not taken any son, nor has there ever been with Him any deity. [If there had been], then each deity would have taken what it created, and some of them would have sought to overcome others' (*la-ʿalā baʿḍuhum ʿalā baʿḍ*).

[78] On these, see Davidson, *Proofs*, 167–170.

[79] Josef van Ess, 'Early Islamic Theologians on the Existence of God', in *Islam and the Medieval West: Papers Presented at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies State University of New York at Binghamton*, ed. Khalil I. Semaan (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1980), 64–81; idem, *Theology and Society*, 3:425–427; James E. Mongomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: in*

were compelled to respond to eternalist challenges from other quarters, namely from Avicenna, who held God to be a First Cause from whom the world eternally derives its existence. Building on Aristotle's theory of a cause's simultaneity with its effect (*Metaphysics,* V, 2, 1014a, 20f), Avicenna asserted that God and the world must necessarily and eternally co-exist in time.[80] In response, al-Ghazālī famously advanced arguments in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* for the world's temporal origination, in support of the idea that the world was voluntarily decreed into existence by God at a single point in time—arguments that also involved cosmological and teleological proofs inferred from the finite and composite nature of the cosmos.[81] Later Islamic theologians would also take up the challenge of eternalism, as is evident from Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī (d. 1194), for whom the issue struck at the very heart of Islam's foundations (*hādhā al-masʾala min ummahāt uṣūl al-dīn*).[82] Rejections of Avicenna's eternalism would also become a common feature in systematic works of dogma. In his *kalām* works, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī adduces several arguments against the claim of the 'philosophers' that the procession of an effect from its cause is eternal.[83] Even Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, a staunch defender of Avicenna, affirmed the temporal origination of the world, at least in his *Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid*, a highly influential epitome of Imāmī theology.[84] Nor were Christian writers immune to the challenge of eternalism: we find responses to the 'philosophers' in a treatise by the Melkite Paul of Antioch (fl. early thirteenth century) and, later, Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*.[85] Although ʿAbdīshōʿ unequivocally affirms that the world had a beginning in time, he makes no mention of those who might argue otherwise.

Praise of Books (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2013), 277–318; Patricia Crone, 'Excursus II: Ungodly Cosmologies', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 103–124.

[80] Michael E. Marmura, 'The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality', in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984), 172–187, esp. 181–187; idem, 'Avicenna on Causal Priority', in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981), 63–83, here 66–67.

[81] al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ch. 1. See also Lenn E. Goodman, 'Ghazali's Argument from Creation (1)', *IJMES* 2, no. 1 (1971): 67–85, (2), 168–188, esp. 172–174; Davidson, *Proofs*, 129–130.

[82] ʿUmar ibn ʿAlī ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, *Risālat ḥudūth al-ʿālam*', in Jean Michot, 'La pandémie avicennienne au VI^{e}/XII^{e} siècle: Présentation, editio princeps et traduction de l'introduction du livre de l'advenue du monde (*Kitāb Ḥudūth al ʿālam*) d'Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī' *Arabica* 40, no. 3 (1993): 287–344, here 328.

[83] See, for example, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Taḍāmun 1986), 1:23ff.

[84] Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥassan Sulaymān (Alexandria: Dār al-Maʿrifa al-Jāmʿiyya, 1996), 71. However, al-Ṭūsī inclined more towards Avicenna's eternalism in his philosophical works; see Toby Mayer, 'Avicenna against Time Beginning: The Debate between the Commentators on the *Ishārāt*', in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: Sources and Reception*, ed. Peter Adamson (London: Warburg Institute, 2007), 125–149, here 140–146.

[85] Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre: troisième base*, 466–468 (text), 467–469 (trans.); Būlus al-Anṭākī, *Risāla ʿaqliyya li-Būlus al-rāhib fī wujūd al-Bārīʾ taʿālā wa-kamālātihi wa-aqānīmihi*, in *Seize traités*, 35–49, here 37–39.

Also absent from ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology are non-teleological proofs for the existence of a creator. Once again, the legacy of Avicenna is important to consider here. For Avicenna, the surest and most accurate proof of God's existence lay not in physico-theological speculation but in the modalities of necessity and contingency, existence and non-existence. His argument runs as follows: that which is contingent on something other than itself for its existence is a possible being (*mumkin*), since it does not deserve to exist on its own merit but requires something else to bring it into existence. The possible being qua itself is thus situated in an equilibrium between existence and non-existence, requiring a 'tipping of the scales' (*takhṣīṣ, tarjīḥ*) for its coming into being or remaining in non-existence. Now, if what tips the scale in favour of its existence is another possible being, then the question moves to *this* possible being and its cause. However, since this process regresses infinitely so that each contingent being is preceded by another like itself, the cause of the chain's existence must be a Necessary Being by virtue of Itself (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihi*).[86] While al-Ghazālī accepted the general premise of this theory, its problem for him lay, inter alia, in the fact Avicenna denied that this preponderance was decreed by God at a specific point in time.[87] As such, al-Ghazālī modulated Avicenna's ontological argument by postulating the existence of a preponderator (*murajjiḥ*) whose will determined the bringing of the world from non-existence into existence at a single point in time.[88] Avicenna's proof would become highly influential among later generations of Muslim theologians,[89] and was picked up on by Barhebraeus, who neatly lays out its principles in an argument for the world's contingency. In his *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*, he states that being (*ʾīṯūṯā*) and non-being (*laytūṯā*) are in a state of equilibrium, thus requiring a preponderator (*mnaṯʿānā*) to tip the scales of existence. If this preponderator were contingent (*meṯmaṣyānā*), then an eternal regress would occur. The preponderator must therefore be an uncaused Necessary Being (*ʾālṣāy ʾīṯūṯā*), who is God and the Creator of the universe.[90]

[86] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of the Healing/al-Shifāʾ: al-ilāhiyyāt*, ed and tr. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), bk. 1, ch. 6; idem, *Kitāb al-Najāt fī al-ḥikma al-manṭiqiyya wa-l-ṭabīʿiyya wa-l-ilāhiyya*, ed. Mājid Fakhrī (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1982), 288–291; idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-al-tanbīhāt li-Abī ʿAlī ibn Sīnā maʿa sharḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1947–1948), 3:7–27. See also Michael E. Marmura, 'Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence in the Metaphysics of *al-Shifāʾ*', *Mediaeval Studies* 42 (1980): 337–352.

[87] Avicenna held that if the world originated at a single point in time, it would imply God's inaction (*taʿaṭṭul*) prior to creation. Since God does nothing in vain, Avicenna reasons, the emanation of His benevolence (*jūd*)—which, like the Proclus (d. 485), he defines as 'existence'—must occur at all times as an inevitable consequence of God's being; see Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics*, bk. 6, ch. 5, § 41.

[88] Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, ch. 1, § 6, 41. See also Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 444–452; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 170. The argument from preponderance is similar to that of particularization (*takhṣīṣ*), which became a characteristic feature of Ashʿarite occasionalism; see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 434–444; Davidson, *Proofs*, 154ff.

[89] See Shihadeh, 'The Existence of God', 213–214.

[90] See Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre: troisième base*, 466 (text), 467 (trans.).

This proof is the first for God's existence in Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum*; only later does he elaborate on more teleological and cosmological reflections. The tendency to privilege ontological proofs in this way was common among post-Avicennian Muslim thinkers, many of whom incorporated a variety of arguments for God's existence—teleological and ontological—into their systematic works. There was, however, disagreement about the efficiacy of these proofs. For example, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī would view Avicenna's method as more noble and reliable (*ashraf wa-awthaq*) than the teleological arguments of the natural philosophers (*al-ḥukamāʾ al-ṭabīʿiyyūn*).[91] As we have seen in this section, ʿAbdīshōʿ's arguments for the existence of a First Cause are based entirely on empirical observations from the physical order. Nevertheless, his inferences of the existence and unity of God from nature were widely accepted and uncontroversial modes of speculation by his time. Moreover, ʿAbdīshōʿ does at various turns speak of the Creator as a Necessary Being, the operative word for God in post-Avicennan discourse. For example, concerning divine pre-existence (*qidam*), he argues that since God's being is through no other being than Himself and the existence of others is through Him, it follows that He must be a Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*).[92] This shared theological idiom, therefore, enabled ʿAbdīshōʿ to rearticulate established church doctrines to a thirteenth-century Christian readership in terms that few Muslims could reject *tout court*.

3.2.2 The Argument from Divine Intellection

In addition to teleological arguments, ʿAbdīshōʿ supplies a proof of God's unity and incorporeity from the ability of pure intellect to perceive itself. The skeletal structure of this argument comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Lambda 9 and *De Anima* III. Here, the intellect is said to contemplate its own essence, and since it is immaterial, the object of its intellection must necessarily be itself.[93] In the ninth and tenth centuries, this theory of self-reflexivity was further developed by the Baghdad Aristotelians, who associated the intellect in the *Metaphysics* and *De Anima* with Aristotle's Prime Mover, the eternal first cause identical to what It intellects, without implication of multiplicity. For instance, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī would express this interrelation as the First Cause existing as intellect *in actu* (*al-ʿaql*

[91] See Ṭūsī's gloss to Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 3:54–55, n. 1. On other Muslim collections of proofs of God's existence in the works of post-Avicennan Muslim theologians, see Shihadeh, 'Existence of God', 211–214. For a Christian Arabic theologian who employs teleological and cosmological arguments alongside Avicenna's argument from contingency, see Daniel ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Mardīnī, *Maqāla fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa-kamālātihi*, in *Vingt traités*, 148–151 (an edition of the first five *fuṣūl* of an otherwise unedited work); Ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Fī ḥadath al-ʿālam*, § 36–79.

[92] *Durra* ch. 4, § 65.

[93] *Metaphysics*, Lambda 9, 1074b36–1075a3 and *De Anima* III, 4,429b9, discussed in Ian M. Crystal, *Self-Intellection and its Epistemological Origins in Greek Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 115–152.

bi-l-fiʿl), able to perceive its own essence through intellection by virtue of Its immateriality. This First Cause is thus Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible—'all this being one essence' (*dhāt wāḥid*).[94] A generation later, Avicenna likewise held that God's ability to perceive His own essence was proof of His uniqueness. He makes this argument in several places throughout his works,[95] but we will take as an example his *al-Risālā al-ʿarshiyya fī tawḥīd Allāh wa-ṣifātihi*. He begins with the premise that knowledge is defined as the occurrence (*ḥuṣūl*) of an idea 'free from the veil of corporeity' (*mujarrada ʿan ghawāsh al-jusmāniyya*).[96] Since God is incorporeal, and His essence is never absent from himself (*lā taghību ʿanhu dhātuhu*), it follows that He must know by virtue of Himself (*ʿālim bi-dhātihi*) rather than through an intermediary.[97] Here, Avicenna characterizes these modes of reflexivity in God as Knowledge, Knowing, and Object of Knowledge (*ʿilm wa-ʿālim wa-maʿlūm*) as 'one thing' (*shayʾ wāḥid*).[98]

An early iteration of this argument in a Christian apologetic context comes from Timothy I's disputation with the caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–785) and another with a (presumably Muslim) logician. In both disputations, Timothy makes the argument that if God is an eternal, unlimited being, then he must himself be eternally both a seer (*ḥāzōyā*)/knower (*yāḏōʿā*) and an object of seeing (*meṯḥazyānā*)/object of knowing (*meṯyaḏʿānā*), without admitting change to His essence.[99] However, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, a pupil of Abū al-Naṣr al-Fārābī, is the first known Christian Arabic author to employ this argument by making an explicit appeal to Aristotelian philosophy—an appeal that would attract the attention of Ibn Kammūna and Ibn Taymiyya some three centuries later (as noted above in Section 3.1). On the issue of divine oneness, Ibn ʿAdī explicitly cites Aristotle to argue that if God is the cause (*sabab*) of His own intellect (*ʿaql*), He must generate the Intellecter (*ʿāqil*) and Intelligible (*maʿqūl*) in Himself—each

[94] Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, ed. and tr. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 70 (text), 71 (trans.).

[95] See, for example, Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 2:115–120, 3:53, 281–285; idem, *Najāt*, 278–279; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (ed.), *Arisṭū ʿinda al-ʿarab: dirāsa wa-nuṣūṣ ghayr manshūra*, 2nd ed. (Wakālat al-Maṭbūʿāt: Kuwait, 1978), 105 (Avicenna's commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*).

[96] Abū al-Ḥusayn ʿAlī ibn Sīnā, *al-Risālā al-ʿarshiyya fī tawḥīd Allāh wa-ṣifātihi*, in *Majmūʿ rasāʾil al-Shaykh al-Raʾīs* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 745/1935), *risāla* no. 4, 8 (text); idem, tr., *Avicenna on Theology*, tr. Arthur J. Arberry (London: John Murray, 1951) 33 (trans.).

[97] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Risālā al-ʿarshiyya, risāla*, no. 4, 8 (text), Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology*, 33 (trans.).

[98] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Risālā al-ʿarshiyya, risāla* no. 4, 8 (text), Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology*, 33 (trans.).

[99] Timothy the Great, *Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdi*, ed. and tr. Martin Heimgartner, CSCO 631–632 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 18, 4–18, 18; idem, *Die Briefe 40 und 41 des Ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I*, ed. and tr. Martin Heimgartner, CSCO 673–674 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), Letter 40, 3, 12–3, 17 (disputation with logician). See also Martin Heimgartner, 'Der ostsyrische Patriarch Timotheos I. (780–823) und der Aristotelismus: Die aristotelische Logik und Dialektik als Verständigungsbasis zwischen den Religionen', in *Orientalische Christen und Europa: Kulturbegegnung zwischen Interferenz, Partizipation und Antizipation*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 11–22.

one conforming to the hypostases of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively.[100] In other words, if it is possible for God to legitimately exist in more than one state of intellection while remaining a single essence, then it cannot be said that He is subject to multiplicity and accidents.

Ibn ʿAdī's writings on Trinitarian doctrine were never systematically laid out, surviving mostly in brief responses to particular Muslim criticisms and questions from his students and colleagues.[101] Yet this particular explanation of the hypostases was to have a lasting impact on Christian Arabic expositions of the Trinity beyond confessional boundaries, especially in the field of Christian–Muslim apologetics. The Melkite ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī (d. 1000) outlines Ibn ʿAdī's theory of divine self-intellection in his Trinitarian theology,[102] as do Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib and Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (fl. eleventh or twelfth century) in theirs.[103] Brief treatises dealing with self-intellection written closer to ʿAbdīshōʿ's time include the Copto-Arabic authors Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Ṭayyib and al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl.[104] Longer, encyclopaedic expositions of Christian dogma also contained this argument such as the late tenth/early eleventh century *Kitāb al-majdal* of ʿAmr ibn Mattā and the *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid* of the Jacobite Abū Naṣr Yaḥyā ibn Jarīr (d. 1104).[105] Al-Ṣafī's half-brother, al-Muʾtaman, would later incorporate sections of Ibn ʿAdī's response to Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's critique of the Trinity in his *Kitāb Majmū uṣūl al-dīn*, which includes the demonstration of God's unity from self-intellection.[106] Thus, by ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, the argument had become something of an *communis opinio* among Christian theologians in the Islamicate world.

[100] Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt li-Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī = Petits traités apologétiques de Yaḥyâ ben ʿAdî*, ed. and tr. Augustin Périer (Paris, J. Gabalda 1920), 18–23, discussed by Emilio Platti, 'Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and his Refutation of al-Warrāq's Treatise on the Trinity in Relation to his other Works', in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 172–191, here 190. See also Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 172–192, esp. 173.

[101] Platti, 'Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and his Refutation of al-Warrāq, 190. See also Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 173.

[102] ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl, *Kalam fī al-thālūth al-muqaddas*, in Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, 'Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch: ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl and his Discourse on the Trinity', *Le Muséon* 124 no. 3–4 (2011): 371–417, here 398 (text), 410 (trans.).

[103] Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla fī al-tathlīth wa-l-tawḥīd*, in Gérard Troupeau, 'Le traité sur l'Unité et la Trinité 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Ṭayyib', *Parole de l'Orient* 2 (1971): 86–89, here 82 (text) and 83 (trans.), referring synonymously to the three states as *ʿilm*, *ʿālim*, and *maʿlūm*; Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Epître sur l'unité et la trinité; traité sur l'intellect; fragment sur l'âme*, ed. and tr. Michel Allard and Gérard Troupeau (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1962), 54–58 (text), 59–61 (trans.).

[104] Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla fī al-radd ʿalā al-muslimīn alladhīna yattahimūna al-naṣārā bi-l-iʿtiqād bi-thalātha āliha*, in *Vingt traités*, 176–178, here 176–177; al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, *al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl: brefs chapitres sur le Trinité et l'Incarnation*, ed. and tr. Samir Khalil Samir, *Patrologia Orientalis* 42, fasc. 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), ch. 5, § 8.

[105] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 64b–65r; Ibn Jarīr, *al-miṣbāḥ al-murshid*, Oxford, Pococke 253, 10r–10v.

[106] Al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Yashtamilu ʿalā al-ṣifāt al-dhāt al-ilāhiyya*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 18, §§ 3 (quoting Aristotle's *De Anima*, Alexander of Aphrodisias's *De Intellectu*, and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *al-Tamthīl li-l-tathlīth*).

ʿAbdīshōʿ expounds his theory of divine self-knowledge in similar terms throughout his works. In the *Pearl* he sets out the Aristotelian premise that anything devoid of matter is defined as 'intellect' (*hawnā*).[107] He elaborates by stating that intellect is external to matter (*mḇaryā d-men hūlē*) and its concomitants (*w-naqqīpwāṯāh*). Because its essence is always manifest (*glīṯā ʾammīnāʾīṯ*) to itself, this intellect must be knowing (*ḥāḵem*) and must know by virtue of itself (*yāḏaʿ yāṯeh*).[108] This argument is expounded in much the same way in the *Durra*, though in far greater detail. Having offered proofs of God's existence from His effects (outlined in the previous section), ʿAbdīshōʿ offers a second path to knowing God: by determining whether there is an affinity (*munāsaba*) between Himself and His essence:

> It has been established that the divine essence (may It be exalted), despite existing, is simple and abstract (*basīṭa mujarrada*). Every abstract thing is called in the language of the Ancients 'intellect' (ʿ*aqlan*), on account of knowing by virtue of itself (*li-ʿilmihi bi-dhātihi*) and the intellect that it possesses. Because every abstract thing is cognizant of (ʿ*āqil*) its essence, insofar as its essence is manifest to itself (*munkashifa li-dhātihi*) and is never absent from it (*lā taghību ʿanhā abadan*) due to its abstraction, and since the essence of everything that knows itself is its [own] intelligible (*maʿqūla*)—it follows that for the essence of the Creator (may He be exalted) there exists three states (*aḥwāl*): Intellect by virtue of Itself (ʿ*aqlan li-dhātihi*); Intellecter by virtue of Itself (ʿ*aqilan li-dhātihi*); and Intelligible from Itself (*maʿqūlan min dhātihi*). From this affinity, it is inconceivable that there can exist for Him anything other than these three, nor can there be or fourth, nor can they be limited to less than three due to one necessitating the existence of the other.[109]

Although ʿAbdīshōʿ does not indicate a source, it should be pointed out that the above passage is a closely-worded reproduction of a discussion of divine unity by the Baghdad peripatetic Ibn Zurʿa, a Christian member of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's circle and a West Syrian Miaphysite by confession.[110] While it is uncertain whether ʿAbdīshōʿ accessed this work directly or through an intermediary source, the occurrence of Ibn Zurʿa's argument in the *Durra* attests to the enduring importance of the pre-Avicennian Christian peripatetic school in our author's scheme. The fact that a similar phraseology occurs in the *Pearl* suggests that this shared Arabic-language inheritance—mediated by the likes of Ibn Zurʿa, a late representative of Baghdad Aristotelianism—influenced the articulation of dogma in a

[107] Cf. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1028b8–32. [108] *Pearl*, 8. [109] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 27–30.
[110] Cf. Abū ʿAlī ʿĪsā ibn Isḥāq ibn Zurʿa, *Risāla ṣannafahā al-shaykh Abū ʿAlī ʿĪsā ibn Isḥāq ibn Zurʿa raḥimahu Allāh fī maʿānī saʿalahu ʿanhā baʿḍ ikẖwānihi anshaʾahā fī Dhī al-Ḥijja min sana thalātha wa-thamān wa-sabʿīn*, in *Vingt traités*, 7–19, here 8–9.

Syriac text that would become highly authoritative within the Church of the East in subsequent centuries. As to ʿAbdīshōʿ's remaining works, proof of God's unity from His self-reflexivity is surprisingly absent in the *Farāʾid* but emerges in the *Khuṭba*, a briefer, homiletic text. Once again, the argument runs: God is pure intellect due to His externality from matter and its concomitants (*li-tajarrudihi ʿan al-hayūlā wa-lawāzimihā*); thus, He must possess three intellective states, namely Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible.[111]

As has been noted, this argument in both Muslim and Christian contexts was used to establish God's oneness. However, in the Christian scheme it has a more specific end: to demonstrate how God could be one while possessing three Trinitarian hypostases (of which more will be said below). Once establishing God's ability to intellect Himself in the *Pearl*, ʿAbdīshōʿ concludes that He must exist as a triadic emanation of Intellect (*ḥawnā*), Wise (*ḥakkīm*), and Living (*ḥayyā*), which are then defined as 'properties' (*dīlāyāṯā*) and 'hypostases' (*qnōmē*).[112] These, in turn, are revealed to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, since the second was generated (*ʾeṯbrī*) by the first, while the third proceeds (*nāpōqā*) from the first, their unity being comparable to the 'the sun being one in its sphericity, radiance, and heat'.[113] The *Durra* employs a similar logic, arguing that the Father generates the Son on the pattern of the Intellecter generated from the Intellect (*li-tawallud minhā*), while the Spirit proceeds from (*khārij ʿan*) the Father just as the Intelligible proceeds from the Intellect.[114] The apologetic function of this explanation is highly significant, since in order to defend Christianity from the charge of polytheism while affirming three hypostases in the Godhead, it was necessary to demonstrate that the three states were identical in essence but differentiated in function—or in this case, that the Sonship of the Trinity differed from the Father in terms of procession and generation, despite their consubstantiality. ʿAbdīshōʿ develops these arguments in far greater detail in his discussion of the Trinitarian hypostases as attributes, to which we now turn.

3.3 The Attribute and Hypostasis Apology

Having addressed two ways in which ʿAbdīshōʿ argues for God as a united and incorporeal First Cause, we now turn our attention to his attribute apology. There are admittedly differences in the ways in which this apology is expressed between his Syriac and Arabic works. What might be translated as 'attribute' in English, for example, does not appear in the *Pearl*; the closest term that we find approaching it is 'property' (*dīlāytā*), which we have already encountered. The meanings 'attribute' and 'property' in Arabic, on the other hand are separate in

[111] *Khuṭba*, § 7. [112] This section of the *Pearl* is revisited and analysed in closer detail below.
[113] *Pearl*, 8–9, with quotations from Heb 1:3 and 1 Cor 1:24. [114] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 31.

definition though semantically related. As we shall see in this section, ʿAbdīshōʿ's terminological distinctions are far more developed in his Arabic writings, due mainly to the central role of attribute apologetics in Christian–Muslim discussions. Yet the aims of his Syriac and Arabic writings remain the same: to reassure Christian readers that the Trinity does not constitute tritheism, while introducing them to the basic precepts of the doctrine.

Christian theologians living under Muslim rule since early Islamic times were faced with the task of articulating a Trinitarian doctrine that safeguarded the concept of three hypostases from Muslim accusations of polytheism. One way of doing this was by explaining how God's attributes related to His essence—an issue that also confronted Muslim *mutakallimūn* at a very early stage.[115] The Christian insistence on the consubstantiality of the three hypostases derived from such statements in the Nicene Creed as the Son is 'the same substance as the Father' (ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρί),[116] thus making the topic foundational in Christian–Muslim discussions about God's threeness and oneness.[117] For Christians writing in Arabic during the opening centuries of the Abbasid era, one way of clarifying this relationship was by classifying the hypostases as 'attributes' (*ṣifāt*), 'properties' (*khawāṣṣ*), and hypostases (*aqānīm*) of a single substance (*jawhar*), though corresponding terms can also be traced back to the Church Fathers.[118] As we shall see in this section, ʿAbdīshōʿ's discussion of the divine attributes departs little from earlier strategies. Nevertheless, in line with earlier Christian apologists, he frames his attribute apology in the language and literary forms of the philosophical *kalām* of his day, in order to make a case for the reasonableness of the Trinity and its intrinsic monotheism.

3.3.1 Teleology Revisited: Attributes of Essence and Action

As surveyed in Section 3.2 above, Muslim theologians often accused Christians of complicating the issue of God's attributes by failing to agree on which precisely

[115] See Richard M. Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1978), 8–38.

[116] Syr. *bar kyāneh d-ʾaḇūwhy*; Ar. *ibn jawhar abīhi wa-kiyānihi*; see Bar Shennāyā, *Commentary on the Creed*, § 80–92.

[117] The foundationality of the Nicene Creed in Muslim–Christian discussions in the Middle Ages is suggested, for example, in Elias bar Shennāyā's literary *majālis* with al-Maghribī. Here the latter asks whether the Christians accept the doctrine of consubstantiality as laid down by the Creed of the 318 fathers at Nicaea (*a-laysa yaqūlūna inna Allāh jawhar thalāthat aqānīm ab wa-ibn wa-rūḥ al-qudus… aw laysa taqbalūna al-amāna allatī qarrarahā wa-dawwanahā al-thalāthma'a wa-thamāniyat ʿashar?*); Bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-majālis*, 10.

[118] Harry Austryn Wolfson 'The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity', *Harvard Theological Review* 49, no. 1 (1956): 1–18, here 7); Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes*, 219.

they were. Indeed, the names of the attributes that medieval Arabic Christian writers associated with the divine essence were pluriform, ranging as they did from Benevolence, Wisdom, and Power in some writers,[119] to Eternal, Living, and Word in others.[120] ʿAbdīshōʿ's representation of the divine attributes is consistent throughout most of his works, differing only between Syriac and Arabic. Although the *Pearl* speaks only of 'properties', consubstantiality is nevertheless implied, since we are told that the Intellect, Wise, and Living are 'substantial properties in one' (*dīlāyāṯā ʾūsyāyāṯā da-ḇ-ḥaḏ*).[121] However, it is in the *Durra* and the *Farāʾid* that a firmer distinction between various kinds of properties and attributes is made. ʿAbdīshōʿ achieves this is by dividing the divine attributes into attributes of essence (*ṣifāṭ al-dhāṭ*), which are shared by none other than God and are limited to three, and attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*), which are transitive (*tataʿaddā*) and possess a relation with another essence (*iḍāfa ilā dhāt ukhrā*) and an action emanating from God's essence (*al-fiʿl al-ṣādir ʿanhā*).[122] Where attributes of action are concerned, ʿAbdīshōʿ revisits the teleology encountered above. Attributes of essence, meanwhile, are those things that pertain solely to God qua God, without reference to His signs in nature.

Such strategies were first articulated in early Christian engagements with Islam. A pertinent example is the *Apology of al-Kindī* (ca. tenth century). Here, the author distinguishes between a 'natural, essential attribute by which He is eternally described' (*ṣifa ṭibāʿiyya dhātiyya lam yazal mawṣūfan bihā*), such as Life and Knowledge, and an 'attribute that He acquires, which is an attribute of action' (*ṣifa iktasabahā wa-hiya ṣifat fiʿlihi*), such as Forgiving and Enriching.[123] The Baghdad peripatetic Ibn al-Ṭayyib also insisted on the distinction between various kinds of attributes, in ways that, as we shall see further on, resemble ʿAbdīshōʿ's explanation some two centuries later. Focusing on the Neoplatonist triad of Generosity-Wisdom-Power,[124] Ibn al-Ṭayyib argues that multiple characteristics (*awṣāf kathīra*) must apply to God even though His essence is one (*al-dhāt wāḥida*). For God's being powerful (*qādir*) cannot be the same as His being generous, since the attribute of Power (*qudra*) indicates the essence's superiority

[119] See, for example, Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 119; Ibn Zurʿa, *Risāla*, 13; Ibn Jarīr, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid*, 8a–8b.

[120] See, for example, the representation of these attributes by Elias bar Shennāyā (*Kitāb al-majālis*, 21–22) in the first 'session' (*majlis*) of his disputation with al-Maghribī, and in Elias ibn al-Muqlī, *Elie II (†1131) Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Gianmaria Gianazza, 2 vols (CEDRAC: Beirut, 2005), 1:185–187.

[121] *Pearl*, 8. [122] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 97; *Farāʾid*, ch. 5, § 9.

[123] Tartar, 'Ḥiwār islāmī-masīḥī, 49.

[124] For the intellectual lineage of this triad, see John Whittaker, 'Proclus and the Middle Platonists', in *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des anciens*, ed. Jean Pepin and Henri Dominique Saffrey (Paris: Éditions du C.N.R.S, 1987), 277–291. On its influence on early Christian Arabic thinkers, see Elvira Wakelnig, 'What does Aristotle Have to Do with the Christian Arabic Trinity? The Triad Generosity-Wisdom-Power in the Alexandrian Prolegomena and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī', *Le Muséon* 3–4 (2017): 445–477 (though she makes no mention of the essence–action *distinguo* discussed here).

to the acquired object of power (*al-maqdūr*), while the attribute of Generosity (*jūd*) characterizes the perfection and order (*al-itqān wa-l-niẓām*) that emanate from the essence onto other beings.[125] Elsewhere in his treatise, Ibn al-Ṭayyib postulates two kinds of attribute: (i) essential attributes that do not go beyond God's essence by attaching themselves to another (*lā tataʿaddā dhātahu bi-an tataʿallaqa bi-ghayrihā min al-dhawāt*) and are no more than three in number, namely God's being Knowledge, Knowing, and knowable; and (ii) attributes of action that number more than three because they act upon things external to the divine essence, such as how creation involves both a creator and a created being external to it.[126]

Later writers would maintain this essence–action distinction in an attempt to explain how the persons of the Trinity are attributes when both Muslims and Christians agree that God must possess more than three of them. Like Ibn al-Ṭayyib, Yaḥyā Ibn Jarīr (d. 1104) circumscribes 'essential attributes' (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) that form part of God's transcendence, such as Eternality, Wisdom, and Life, which are restricted to three (*maḥṣura fī thalāth*), and transitive or immanent attributes (*ṣifāt al-taʿaddī*), which are performed upon (or to) a substance (*jawhar*) other than that performing (*fāʿil*) the action, and are therefore multiple in number (*ʿaddūhā ʿadadan kathīran*).[127] The Coptic bishop Paul al-Būshī (d. ca. 1250) speaks at length about attributes of action (*ṣifāt fiʿliyya*) that are relative (*muḍāfa*) to that being acted upon, and natural attributes (*ṣifāt ṭibāʿiyya*) that pertain only to God.[128] This distinction is also present in Syriac discourses on the divine attributes: Barhebraeus, for example, makes a similar distinction between essential appellations (*šummāhē ʾūsyāyē*) and relative appellations (*šummāhē [ʾ]ḥyānāyē*), the former including Wisdom and Life, which are negative (*ʾapōpāṭīqāyē*) since they pertain to none other than God, while the latter encompass such attributes as Powerful and Benevolent, which are in relation (*da-b-peḥmā*) to things that have been brought into existence.[129] Among the essential attributes in ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme, we have already encountered the Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible, classified as such because only a truly incorporeal being may manifest these three states at once.[130] Other classes of attributes in ʿAbdīshōʿ's apology will now be addressed.

ʿAbdīshōʿ's own exposition of this distinction is remarkably similar to that of earlier Nestorian writers like Ibn al-Ṭayyib. Recall that Ibn al-Ṭayyib argues for a multiplicity of attributes, with the example of the attribute of God's

[125] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla fī al-tathlīth*, 78 (trans.), 79 (text); discussed in Sadowski, *The Trinitarian Analogies*, 128–129.

[126] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla fī al-tathlīth*, 84 (trans.), 85 (text).

[127] Ibn Jarīr, *Kitāb al-murshid*, 7v–8r.

[128] Būlus al-Būshī, *Maqāla fī al-tathlīth wa-l-tajassud wa-ṣiḥḥat al-masīḥiyya*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir (Beirut: CEDRAC, 1983), § 29ff.

[129] Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre: troisième base*, 566 (text), 567 (trans.).

[130] ʿAbdīshōʿ explicitly calls these essential attributes in *Durra*, ch. 4, § 96 and *Khuṭba*, § 10.

Generosity being distinct from that of His Power. In a similar vein, ʿAbdīshōʿ distinguishes God's Generosity, Wisdom, and Power from one another. Yet whereas Ibn al-Ṭayyib describes God's Generosity as acts of perfection and order, ʿAbdīshōʿ states His Generosity is 'the overflow of all that that must be upon all that must be, without compulsion, motive, and need' (*ifāḍat kull mā yanbaghī ʿalā mā yanbaghī min ghayr qahr wa-dāʿiyat iḥtijāj wa-faqr*).[131] Although both Ibn al-Ṭayyib and ʿAbdīshōʿ draw from a common inheritance, we may detect in the latter's statement an echo of Avicenna's conception of the First's Generosity as 'the overflow of what must be, without compensation' (*al-jūd huwa ifāḍat mā yanbaghī bi-lā ʿiwaḍ*).[132] In other words, God's benevolence is entirely free of external factors, motivations, or anything lacking in His essence, and it is through His benevolence that beings other than Himself attain their perfection.[133] Thus, in ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme, God's being benevolent must be different from his three essential attributes, since His Generosity is predicated of an object of generosity—whereas His being Intellect, Intellecting, and Intelligible are predicated of Himself. Generosity, therefore, is one of multiple (*muta-kaththira*) attributes of action that variously describe God as Creator (*al-Khāliq*), Enricher (*al-Rāziq*), Commander (*al-Āmir*), and Able (*al-Qādir*)—all of which emanate from His essence but proceeds to a contingent being. ʿAbdīshōʿ concludes later in the *Durra* that 'there is no Creator but for the created (*makhlūq*), no Commander but for the commanded (*maʾmūr*), and no Able but for the enabled (*maqdūr*)'.[134] Having affirmed this distinction, ʿAbdīshōʿ rejects the accusation of his non-Christian interlocutor that the doctrine of the Trinity implies multiplicity (*kathra*) in God's essence. Rather, he asserts, 'Christians ascribe (*yaʿṭūna*) oneness (*waḥdāniyya*) to the essence and threeness (*tathlīth*) to the attributes'.[135] And yet the threeness here pertains only to the essential attributes, namely Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible—attributes that are repeatedly identified with the hypostases of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[136]

ʿAbdīshōʿ takes the distinction further by equating the essential attributes of Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible (analogous to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) respectively with those of Eternal, Wise, and Living.[137] These constitute essential attributes because God alone, as Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) who created the universe *ex nihilo*, possesses the attribute of pre-eternity,[138] and only He lives

[131] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 49.
[132] Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 3:115–127. Cf. idem, *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, bk 6, ch. 5, § 41.
[133] Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 142. For the tradition of *neoplatonica arabica* underlying Avicenna's definition of God's generosity, see Peter Adamson, 'From the Necessary Existent to God', in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170–189, here 187–188.
[134] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 98. The *Farāʾid*, ch. 5, § 10 adds to this list 'the Forgiving' (*al-ghaffār*).
[135] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 53.
[136] *Durra*, ch. 4, § 87–90; *Khuṭba*, § 6; *Farāʾid*, ch. 5, § 18–26.
[137] *Durra*, ch. 4 § 96.
[138] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 38; *Farāʾid*, ch. 5, §§ 13–14.

by virtue of Himself.[139] However, it is the attribute of wisdom that receives more attention, at least in the *Pearl* and the *Durra*. Here, the teleology we encountered previously is revisited in our author's discussion of divine wisdom. In the *Pearl* he guides his reader to look upon man 'as microcosm (*ʿālmā zʿōrā*) and epitome for the whole order of creation' as a certain witness to God's Wisdom.[140] He goes on:

> That the world is arranged is revealed by the wondrous order (*ṭukkāsā tmīhā*) of the heavens, the planets, the elements, with all their productive powers, generating plants, trees, and the limbs of animals and men (*haddāmē d-ḥaywāṭā wa-d-barnāšā*), the wondrous order of which surpasses the wisdom and knowledge of all created beings.[141]

ʿAbdīshōʿ reaffirms this point in the *Durra*, this time repeating the argument from composition and the orderliness of nature in order to establish the teleological direction of God's wisdom:

> It would be absurd were the giver of wisdom and creator of the wise not wise, and the originator of knowledge and creator of the knowing not knowing. He is therefore wise. How could this be otherwise, when among His creations there are wonders (*gharāʾib*) of wisdom that dazzled the intellects of the learned and astonished the minds of the contemplative,[142] so much so that the ancients composed books concerning the precision[143] of the nature of the heavens and earth and all that applies to Him [...] regarding His being the compelling force behind creation (*lāzim li-l-akwān*), despite the mutual antipathy of the elements (*maʿa taḍādd al-arkān*) [...]; so much so that they spoke about the benefits of animal limbs (*manāfiʿ aʿḍāʾ al-ḥayawān*), which, if impaired even slightly, would be detrimental to four-legged creatures, birds, and humans, and were perplexed by [His] providence (*ʿināya*) and guidance? From this it is established that He is wise.[144]

Once again, it is possible to argue that ʿAbdīshōʿ is appealing to a theological common ground. As we observed earlier in this chapter, such natural theological strategies were rooted in Hellenistic and patristic thought but were by no means the preserve of one community. God's wisdom in Trinitarian theology relates to His names, and so it was not uncommon for Arabic Christian authors to give their attribute apologies a Qurʾānic timbre that resonated with the divine names in Islam.[145] In Muslim *kalām* circles, these divine names were premised on traces and signs of God's actions in the natural world. For example, an empiricist

[139] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 87; *Farāʾid*, ch. 5, § 17; *Profession*, §3. [140] *Pearl*, 4. [141] *Pearl*, 4.
[142] Reading *mutaʾammilīn* for *mutaʾallimīn*. [143] Reading *iḥkām* for *aḥkām*.
[144] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 70–6.
[145] See, for example, Paul of Antioch and the author of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*, who, having argued that the Trinitarian Word (equal to the Son) is attested in the Qurʾān, state that 'these are

teleology is very much present in the thought of al-Ghazālī, particularly in his explanation of the divine names in the Qurʾān. Here, al-Ghazālī infers divine wisdom from the physical world, directing his reader to contemplate the earth as a 'macrocosm' of God's order and purpose.[146]

ʿAbdīshōʿ's discussion of God's wisdom indicates a further source of teleology shared between Christians and Muslims who tended to speak of the physical world in terms of provision to living beings.[147] Theologians from both faiths were especially indebted to the empirical reflections of Galen of Pergamum (d. 200), particularly those from his *De Usu Partium* ('On the Usefulness of Limbs') in which he discusses the intelligent design of the Demiurge-Creator.[148] A further source of inspiration came from treatises on providence by a string of late antique and early medieval Christian writers, namely Diodore of Tarsus (d. 390), Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. 457), Īshōʿbokht, Metropolitan of Fārs (fl. late eighth CE.?), and Jibrīl ibn Nūḥ al-Anbārī (fl. 850)—all of whom are named by the author of an Arabic work on natural theology attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ.[149] Indeed, discussions about God and nature provided a fertile site of Muslim–Christian theological encounter throughout the ninth century.[150] Later Muslim thinkers of various traditions continued this mode of natural theological speculation. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī discusses the 'benefit of limbs' (*manāfiʿ al-aʿḍāʾ*) to living beings and the wisdom (*iḥkām*) and precision (*itqān*) of the created order.[151] Similarly, the Twelver Shīʿī theologian al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) points to God's well-wrought and perfect creations as proof of His attribute of knowing.[152] So too did later Christian writers seize on this theological common ground. The Christian works cited by the aforementioned Pseudo-Jāḥiẓian writer were certainly known to

attributes (*ṣifāt*) of the substance (*jawhar*) which are just like names (*asmāʾ*), and each one of the attributes is different from the other, and He is one God, one Creator'. Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim–Christian Polemic*, §§ 31–32.

[146] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fi sharḥ maʿānī asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. Fadlou Shehadi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1982), 152, cited by Ahmed El Shamsy, 'Al-Ghazālī's Teleology and the Galenic Tradition: Reading *The Wisdom in God's Creations* (*al-Ḥikma fī makhlūqāt Allāh*)', in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of Ghazālī. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary. Vol. 2*, ed. Frank Griffel (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 90–112, here 93.

[147] Shihadeh, *Existence of God*, 204.

[148] El Shamsy, 'Teleology and the Galenic Tradition', 104; Gregor Schwarb, 'Early Kalām and the Medical Tradition', In *Philosophy and Medicine in the Formative Period of Islam*, ed. Peter Adamson and Peter Pormann (London: Warburg Institute, 2017), 104–169, here 115–120.

[149] Ps.-Jāḥiẓ, *al-ʿIbar wa-l-ʿtibār*, ed. Ṣābir Idrīs (Cairo: al-ʿArabī li-l-Nashr), 29–30. The relevant passage is translated in H.A.R. Gibb, 'The Argument from Design: A Muʿtazilite Treatise Attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ', *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume, Part I*, ed. Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi (Budapest: n.p., 1948), 150–162, here 153–154.

[150] See Mongomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: in Praise of Books*, 277–318, which considers al-Jāḥiẓ's writings on creation in light of comparable works by a host of contemporary and near contemporary Christian thinkers such as Theodore Abū Qurra, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, and Nonnus of Nisibis.

[151] Fakhr al-dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī Saqqā, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), 1:233, cited in Shihadeh, *The Existence of God*, 202.

[152] See Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī*, 189–190.

ʿAbdīshōʿ, particularly those cosmological works by Diodore, Tarsus, and Īshōʿbokht, all three of which are listed in his *Catalogue*.[153] Moreover, the physico-theological speculations of the aforementioned al-Anbārī's are echoed in a treatise by Elias bar Shennāyā on God's wisdom. Here, Bar Shennāyā intuits God's existence from the marvels of the cosmos as witnessed from the movement of the planets, the changing of the seasons, and the advantages to created beings—a discussion that eventually leads him to an affirmation of the world's temporal creation.[154] As ʿAbdīshōʿ would later do, Ibn Jarīr alludes to Galen's *De Usu Partium* in relation to God's attribute of Wisdom.[155] Among ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christian contemporaries, al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, on the authority of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, explicitly mentions Galen and his *De Usu Partium* (*Fī al-manāfiʿ al-aʿḍāʾ*), this time in relation to God's knowledge of particulars as evidenced by the traces (*āthār*) of His Wisdom in created beings.[156] Barhebraeus also cites God's 'marvellous works' (*tmīhūṯ ʿḇāḏē*) as exemplified by the limbs of animals and humans, as proof of His attribute of uncontested knowledge.[157] Thus, the empiricist teleology inherited from earlier centuries, together with theories of micro- and macrocosm, served as yet another shared idiom from which ʿAbdīshōʿ drew in order to make a firm case for a Christian God that possessed attributes of action as well as essence.

But this theological common ground was not without limits. For Christians, theories of divine providence served a very specific purpose: to demonstrate God as Trinity. For example, in the abovementioned treatise by Elias bar Shennāyā on providence, contemplation of the cosmic order leads to knowledge of an almighty, wise creator possessing three hypostases.[158] It is to *this* end that ʿAbdīshōʿ utilizes such theories. In a poem on man as microcosm (*ʿal hāy d-ḇarnāšā ʿālmā zʿōrā*) in his *Paradise of Eden*, ʿAbdīshōʿ reflects on the correspondences between humans and nature. Perspiration, for example, is likened to the flow of streams and rivers,

[153] For works on providence by Diodore and Theodoret, see respectively *Catalogue*, 55 (text), 160 (trans.) and 44 (text), 153 (trans.), both of which are listed as *da-Mparnāsūṭā* (*De providencia*/Περὶ προνοίας). The work by Diodore is lost in both Greek and Syriac, but survives in fragments cited by later authors; see Heinz Gerhard Weis, 'Diodor von Tarsus, Περὶ προνοίας', in *Paul de Lagarde und die syrische Kirchengeschichte* (Göttingen: Göttinger Arbeitskreis für syrische Kirchengeschichte, 1968), 217–230. The work by Īshōʿbokht (better known as Īshōʿbokht of Rev Ardashīr) is also lost but is listed by ʿAbdīshōʿ as *ʿAl hānā kol* ('On this Universe'); *Catalogue*, 106 (text), 210 (trans.). The pseudo-Jāḥiẓian author who employs this work in his *al-ʿIbar wa-l-ʿtibār*, 30 tells us that it was originally written in Persian.

[154] Elias bar Shennāyā, *Risāla fī ḥudūth al-ʿālam wa-waḥdāniyyat al-Khāliq wa-tathlīth al-aqānīm*, in *Vingt traités*, 75–103. Cf. Ps.-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Dalāʾil wa-l-ʿtibār ʿalā al-khalq wa-l-tadbīr*, ed. Muḥammad Rāghib Ṭabbākh (Aleppo: n.p., 1928), 75. The latter work was attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ by its modern editor and is not to be confused with another Pseudo-Jāḥiẓian work, *al-ʿIbar wa-l-ʿtibār*, cited above. Moreover, unlike Bar Shennāyā, al-Anbārī's meditation on the wonders of creation does not culminate in an exposition Trinitarian theology (on which more below), a fact that perhaps facilitated its Muslim reception.

[155] Ibn Jarīr, *Kitāb al-murshid*, 7v.

[156] Ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Fī dhāt al-bārīʾ*, § 38.

[157] Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre: troisième base*, 508 (text), 509 (trans.).

[158] Bar Shennāyā, *Risāla fī ḥudūth al-ʿālam*, 99–101.

and the sprouting of hair is analogous to that of grass and shoots.[159] After meditating on the macrocosm's correspondences to the microcosm of man, ʿAbdīshōʿ leads his readers to the cause of all these things: a wise and almighty being possessed of three persons:

> Man is an image (*ṣalmā*) that, through composite parts,
> signifies how a lord and cause
> gathered contrary forces
> into a single harmony.
> In him is held a sea of knowledge,
> and artifices (*ʾummānwāṯā*) bear witnesses to this.
> [. . .]
> God increased [His] bounty, which by grace
> is established by His accurate composition,
> enriching and nourishing that lacking
> an ineffable nature.
> He bears the powers of contrary forces,
> [to wit,] heat, cold,
> moistness, and dryness,
> from which there is generation and corruption.
> Thanks be to the Trinity,
> which is signified by the mortal man:
> the Father by the Essence, the Son by the Word,
> and Holy Spirit by the Life.
> Let our soul give glory
> to that which signifies the power of hidden things
> through an amazing and ornate likeness,
> the trove of mysteries and treasure.[160]

In his gloss to this passage, ʿAbdīshōʿ explains that the 'image' or 'likeness' (*ṣalmā*) contained in the microcosm of man is none other than 'the likeness of divinity in which divine mysteries are hidden away in the rational soul' (*ṣalmā d-ʾalāhūṯā d-ḇeh ksēn [ʾ]rāzē b-napšā mlīltā*).[161] More will be said about the idea of the human soul's divine likeness in the following chapter. For now, it is noteworthy that in the Syriac and Christian Arabic scheme, the telos of creation is knowledge of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three hypostases that are reflected in the Essence, Word, and Life of humans via the rational soul. Among the Muslim authors so far mentioned, however, the purpose of such teleological reflections was to affirm God's attributes without confining them to a Trinity. Despite the ecumenical

[159] *Paradise*, 80. [160] *Paradise*, 80–81.
[161] *Paradise*, 81. To this effect, ʿAbdīshōʿ cites the parable of the hidden treasure in Mat 13:44.

appeal of this empiricist teleology, therefore, its use among Muslims and Christians served two divergent forms of monotheism.

3.3.2 Hypostases of the One Substance

We have already observed that ʿAbdīshōʿ speaks of three essential attributes in one divine substance. However, ʿAbdīshōʿ has yet to define these hypostases and clarify their relationship to God's substance. Nowhere in his theology does he presume the meaning of 'hypostasis' to be obvious. The Arabic term *qunūm*, pl. *aqānīm*, is a loanword derived from the Syriac *qnōmā*, which in turn corresponds to the Greek πρόσωπον and ὑπόστασις.[162] While in Greek ὑπόστασις has the literal sense of being an 'underlying state', in Syriac *qnōmā* has the basic meaning of 'self'.[163] In line with earlier Christian apologists, ʿAbdīshōʿ articulates a definition of *qnōmā*/*uqnūm* that adequately conveys the hypostases' consubstantiality, which in medieval Syriac and Christian Arabic apologies often involved an Aristotelian classification of existent beings that affirmed God as a substance[164]—a classification of which Muslim observers had become well aware, as we noted previously.

To better understand ʿAbdīshōʿ's definition of hypostases, it is worth delineating the intellectual tradition from which he draws. The Cappadocian Fathers held that the distinction between the divine substance and Its hypostases was one of generality and propriety. In this scheme, the divine substance is general and a species, while Its hypostases are individual and proper.[165] Building on this legacy, John of Damascus went further by reformulating the ontology of Aristotle's

[162] On the history of the term hypostases, see Heinrich Dürrie, 'Hypostasis', in *Platonica minora* (Munich: Fink, 1976), 13–69. The term *qnōmā* in its Christological context will be discussed in the following chapter. As to the term 'person', 'Abdīshōʿ does not appear to employ this word anywhere in his Trinitarian theology, though it often appears in Christian Arabic discourse as *wajh* ('face'), a literal translation of the Greek, and the Greco-Syriac loanword *farṣūf*. For an extensive analysis of the term *wajh* in early Christian Arabic Trinitarian theology, see Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms*, ch. 4.

[163] See, for example, Sydney H. Griffith, 'The Concept of *al-uqnūm* in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity', in *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (Goslar, septembre 1980), ed. Samir Khalil Samir (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1982) 169–191.

[164] See, for example, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī. A Response to the Arabs*, ed. and tr. Joseph Amar CSCO 614–615 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 20 (text), 19–20 (trans.); Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre: troisième base*, 564 (text), 565 (trans.); Ebied and Thomas, *Christian–Muslim Polemic*, 134, 136, 138 (text), 135, 137, 139 (trans.). Earlier examples include ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-burhān*, in Michel Hayek, *Kitāb al-burhān wa-Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1977), 51–52; idem, *al-Masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba*, 162–164; Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt* 22, 44; Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla mukhtaṣara fī al-aqānīm wa-l-jawhar*, in Gérard Troupeau, 'Le traité sur les hypostases et la substance de ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṭayyib', in *Mélanges dédiés à F.M. Pereija* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 640–644.

[165] On universals and individuals in the Cappadocians, see Johannes Zachhuber, 'Universals in the Greek Church Fathers', in *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2013), 425–470; idem, 'Individuality and the Theological Debate about "Hypostasis"', in *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zacchuber (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 91–110.

Categories by considering the Stagirite's four-part classification of existents. In his *Categories* (V 2a11–4a22), Aristotle divides existents into universal accidents (e.g., white), individual accidents (e.g., this white), universal substances (e.g., horse), and individual substance (e.g., this horse). In John's scheme, hypostases are identified with individual (i.e., primary) substances while the divine essence is placed on a footing with universal (i.e., secondary) substances. The divine essence, therefore, is a secondary substance—in this case, the universal nature of 'divine being'. What instantiates it as *the* God are Its primary substances: the three hypostases.[166]

It was not long before a similar understanding of hypostasis took hold among Syriac Christian thinkers. As previously noted, the term *qnōmā* literally means 'self', but in theological discourse it could also denote an individual. In his *Scholion*, the East Syrian Theodore bar Kōnī (fl. eighth century) enumerates Aristotle's four-fold division of existents as substance, accident, universal, and particular—the latter for which he employs the term *qnōmā*. He then elaborates on the difference between Aristotle's primary and secondary substance, stating that a primary substance is like a certain individual human (*qnōmā ḥaḏ men qnōmē da-ḇnaynāšā*), while secondary substance is the genus or species of animal in which the human falls. Theodore insists that primary substance is nobler than (*myaqrā men*) secondary substance because the primary is closer to sight and perception (*ḥzāṯā wa-rḡeštā*) than the secondary, providing the example of 'Peter and Paul', which are specific, concrete, and individuated—as opposed to their simply being 'animal', which is common and unindividuated. Without the primary, Theodore concludes, the secondary would not exist, the implication being that the *qnōmē* supply God's substance with their concrete, distinct realities.[167] This distinction is made plain in a Syriac metrical treatise known as *Zqōrā mlaḥmā* ('The Well-Woven Fabric') by John bar Zō'bī (fl. first half of the thirteenth century). The relevant section from this discourse is worth citing *in extenso*:

> Substance (*kyānā*) is distinct from *qnōmā*
> in the quantity that it possesses.
> For substance is universal (*gawwānāyā*),
> while *qnōmā* is individual (*'īḥīḏāyā*).
> When substance is divided,
> it constitutes species as well as *qnōmā*.

[166] See Christophe Erismann, 'A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology', *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011): 268–287.

[167] Theodore bar Kōnī, *Theodorus bar Kōnī. Liber scholiorum*, ed. Addai Scher, 2 vols., CSCO 65–66 (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1910, 1912), 2:7 (text); idem, *Théodore bar Koni. Livres des scholies (recension de Séert)*, tr. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, 2 vols. CSCO 431–432 (Leuven: Peeters, 1981), 2:4–5 (trans.).

But when *qnōmā* is divided,
it withers away (*meṯḥabbālū meṯḥabbal*).
For when you divide
qnōmā into parts,
it withers away
and does not preserve its substance in each one.
Substance is simple (*pšīṭā*),
but *qnōmā* is composite (*mrakḇā*).
For *qnōmā* is perceived with the eyes,
while substance is perceived with the mind.
When you speak of substance,
your mind encompasses the universal.
But when you speak of *qnōmā*,
your mind encompasses [only] one.
This is the difference
between substance and *qnōmā*.[168]

This definition would also underpin the Christian Arabic understanding of hypostasis in subsequent centuries. The idea of *qunūm* as individual and particular occurs in a Trinitarian apology attributed to the East Syrian patriarch Israel of Kashkar (d. 872). Like Theodore bar Kōnī, Israel holds that an individual (*shakhṣ*) is something through which recognition occurs (*waqaʿa al-taʿāruf bihi*) when the senses perceive the bodies of a certain species. He then defines *qunūm* as a Syriac expression meaning a particular essence (*ʿayn khāṣṣ*) that is self-subsistent (*qāʾim bi-nafsihi*).[169] In his *Kitāb al-manfaʿa*, the eleventh-century Melkite theologian ʿAbdallah ibn al-Faḍl, who seems to draw on Israel of Kashkar,[170] defines *qunūm* as 'a Syriac word that the Syrians apply to a unique, singular thing' (*al-shayʾ al-mufrad al-wāḥid*).[171] This understanding of the term 'hypostasis' would endure among Christians living in Islamic lands throughout the later Middle Ages. In an anonymous East Syrian Arabic commentary on the Nicene Creed, dated by its modern editor to the twelfth century, the author launches into a four-part classification of existents (mentioned earlier), identifying *qunūm* with Aristotle's 'particular

[168] This work has only been partially edited; see John bar Zōʿbī, *Puršān kyānā men qnōmā w-parṣōpā men ʾappē*, in Giuseppe Furlani, 'Yoḥannān bar Zōʿbi sulla differenza tra natura, ipostasi, persona e facia', *Rivista degli studi orientali* 12 (1929–1930): 272–285, here 273 (text), 279–280 (trans.). For the entire work, see idem, *Zqōrā mlaḥmā d-ʿal šarbā d-haymānūṯā ʾōrtādōksāytā d-mettawdē men ʿedtā qāṯōlīqī wa-mšarrar b-ṭaḥwyāṯā d-men kṯāḇay quḏšā*, Chaldean Cathedral 349, here 6r (digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, project number CCM 349).

[169] Israel of Kashkar, *A Treatise on the Unity and Trinity of God by Israel of Kashkar (d. 872)*, ed. Bo Holmberg (Lund: Plus Ultra, 1989), § 148.

[170] In particular, on the issue of God's being one as a species (*wāḥid ka-l-nawʿ*) and *qunūm* being a particular individual; cf. Israel of Kashkar, *A Treatise on the Unity*, §143–148 and ch. 5 of Ibn Faḍl's *Kalam fī al-thālūth al-muqaddas*, 399 (text); 410 (trans.).

[171] Ibn Faḍl's *Kalām fī al-thālūth al-muqaddas*, 399 (text), 410 (trans.).

individual', which, he explains, 'is a substance that is characterised by an essential attribute (*takhaṣṣaṣa bi-ṣifa dhātiyya*), such as our saying [that God is] "living" (*al-ḥayy*)'.[172] He then goes on to state that God encompasses both modalities of primary and secondary substance while remaining one. In response to his non-Christian interlocutor's objection that God cannot be one, a species, and universal while also being one, unique, and particular, the author of the commentary cites Plato's dictum that 'the One is many and the many are One'.[173]

Thus, by the thirteenth century, much ink had been spilled over the precise relationship between the divine substance and the three hypostases. But what was the relationship between attributes, properties, and hypostases? Ibn al-Faḍl makes a firm distinction between them, asserting that properties and hypostases are not the same because the former are constituents of the meanings of the latter (*al-khawāṣṣ ashyāʾ dākhila fī maʿānī al-aqānīm*).[174] In the first half of the thirteenth century, John Bar Zōʿbī neatly lays out this distinction by asserting that the attributes signify the appellation of the hypostasis (*qnōmā*), but are not themselves the hypostasis. For example, the Father in the Godhead is characterized by the attributes 'begetter' and 'not begotten', thereby distinguishing the Father from the Son and signifying the *qnōmā* of Fatherhood. Thus, the three hypostases are made distinct by properties and personal names (*prīšīn gēr b-ḏīlāyāṯā / w-ḇa-šmāhē parṣōpāyē*) but are nevertheless identical to the substance. Only the essential properties (*dīlāyāṯā kyānyāṯā*, i.e., intransitive attributes) may be considered the same as hypostases, such as 'divinity', 'eternity', and 'lordship'.[175]

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Turning now to ʿAbdīshōʿ's exposition of hypostasis, his treatment of the issue is far briefer but nevertheless draws directly from the tradition outlined above. To be sure, our author was well aware of the philosophical problems underlying his church's Trinitarianism; in his *Profession*, he states, without further elaboration, that the *qunūm* is 'the primary substance that indicates the true nature of the existence of the general (i.e., universal), as Aristotle verified' (*al-jawhar al-awwal al-dāll ʿalā ḥaqīqat wujūd al-ʿāmm kamā ḥaqqaqa Arisṭāṭālīs*)'.[176] In his other works, however, the finer points of these issues are overlooked in favour of concision, thus reflecting the summary and catechetical nature of these texts.

[172] Cf. discussion of essential attributes in previous section.

[173] Anonymous, *Sharḥ amānat ābāʾ majmaʿ Nīqīya al-thalāthmiʾa wa-thamāniya ʿashar*, ed. Pierre Masry, 2 vols. (Beirut: CEDRAC, 2011), 1:369–370. The statement, placed in the mouth of Socrates, is from Plato's dialogue *Philebus* 14c1–15c3.

[174] Ibn al-Faḍl, *Kalām fī al-thālūth al-muqaddas*, 404 (text), 416 (trans.).

[175] Bar Zōʿbī, *Zqōrā mlaḥmā*, 10v. See also above discussion of essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyya*) in earlier Christian Arabic discourse.

[176] *Profession*, § 48.

The *Pearl* launches into its discussion of the hypostases by making the following distinction between existents:

> Since everything that exists is either an accident (*geḏšā*) or a substance (*ʾūsīyā*), and the essence of the divine being (*ʾīṯyā*) is by no means accepting of accidents, these three properties are therefore substantial (*ʾūsyāyāṯā*). On this account, they are called 'hypostases' (*qnōmē*) and not 'accidental powers' (*ḥaylē geḏšānāyē*) nor do they cause change (*šuḥlāpā*) in the divine being, nor plurality (*saggīʾūṯ menyānā*).[177]

Note that in the above passage, ʿAbdīshōʿ's classification is twofold, not fourfold as in the previous examples, thus leaving the distinction between particular and universal implied. The *Durra* expounds a similar yet more elaborate distinction, this time mentioning Aristotle's four-part classification of existents:

> Aristotle has explained in his *Categories* that every existent is either a substance (*jawhar*) or an accident (*ʿaraḍ*), and each is either a particular (*khāṣṣ*) or a universal (*ʿāmm*).[178] Since these three attributes cannot be accidents in the essence of God (may He be exalted), because He is not accepting of accidents and change (*taghayyur*), nor are they three general substances due to what has been established concerning the true nature of His oneness—His essence (may It be exalted) thus possesses substantial properties (*khawāṣṣ jawhariyya*). For the Christians call the essence 'substance', since according to them 'substance' is an expression of the self-subsistent being (*al-mawjūd al-qāʾim bi-nafsihi*); they call intransitive attributes (*al-ṣifāt allatī lā tataʿaddā*) 'properties' (*khawāṣṣan*); and the entire concept of the substance they call hypostases (*aqānīm*). According to them, [the term] 'hypostasis' is the taking of the attribute's meaning with the concept of the essence being described (*tanāwul maʿnā al-ṣifa maʿa mafhūm al-dhāt al-mawṣūfa*). Thus, if the terms are sound, there is no doubt concerning them.[179]

[177] *Pearl*, 9.

[178] As in the antecedents discussed above, ʿAbdīshōʿ appears to be referring to Aristotle's four-part classification of existents in *Categories*, V 2a11–4a22, which are (i) 'primary substance;' (ii) 'secondary substance'); (iii) 'particular accident;' and (iv) 'general accident'. I owe this point to Noble and Trieger, *Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch*, 383–384.

[179] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 82–86. The last sentence (*idhā kānat al-musammiyyāt saḥīḥatan lā rayba fīhā*) also appears in Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla fī al-tathlīth* 82 (trans.), 83 (text). It also brings to mind an expression employed by the author of the Pseudo-Ghazālian *Radd al-jamīl*, echoed by Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Ṭayyib in his response, which runs: 'If the concepts are sound then there is no dispute about wording or about technical words coined by the linguists' (*fa-idhā saḥḥat al-maʿānī fa-lā mushāḥḥata fī al-alfāẓ wa-lā fīmā yaṣṭaliḥu ʿalayhi al-muṣṭaliḥūn*); cf. Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqāla fī al-radd ʿalā al-muslimīn*, 178 and Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-jamīl / A Fitting Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus Attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī*, ed. and tr. Mark Beaumont and Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 160 (text), 161 (trans.). See also Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1972), 467.

Similarly in his *Farāʾid*, having established that God is a unitary and self-subsistent being and the sole cause of creation, ʿAbdīshōʿ goes on to assert:

> Since every existent is either an accident (*ʿaraḏ*) or a substance (*jawhar*), and these three attributes of God (may He be exalted) are not accidents in relation to His essence, neither many identical substances nor different identical essences, but rather substantial properties (*khawāṣṣ jawhariyya*)—they are called 'hypostases' (*aqānīm*). For the true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of the hypostases is the taking of an essential attribute with the self-subsistent [i.e. substance] that it describes (*akhdh ṣifa dhātiyya maʿa mawṣūfihā al-qāʾim bi-nafsihi*). Thus, it is possible for us to say that the Creator (may He be exalted) is a single substance and three hypostases.[180]

This standard definition of God as substance, therefore, runs more or less consistently throughout ʿAbdīshōʿ's theological works. Put simply, God is substance because He is self-subsistent and His hypostases provide the concrete reality that is described through attributes, such as the attribute of 'begotten' being made concrete through the hypostasis 'Son'.

Yet the predictability of substance to God presented a further stumbling block in Christian–Muslim discussions about divine unity. This was particularly the case among Ashʿarite theologians who understood *jawhar* as an atom of created reality rather than something self-subsistent and not in a subject (as noted above in Section 3.1). God's being a substance was similarly problematic for Muslim Avicennians. In line with Aristotle, Avicenna held a substance (*jawhar*) to be that which is not in a subject, as opposed to an accident which inheres in a substance. However, he also held that God cannot be a substance since substantiality, like accidentality, can only apply to contingent beings subject to characterization; God's nature, on the other hand, is ineffable and thus beyond substance.[181] The contentiousness of the definition is also reflected in Christian–Muslim controversies prior to ʿAbdīshōʿ, for example, in the works of Elias bar Shennāyā. During his dialogue with the Muslim vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Maghribī in 1027, Bar Shennāyā invokes the Aristotelian distinction between various kinds of existents in order to demonstrate how God is subsistent by virtue of Himself (*qāʾim bi-nafsihi*) and therefore a *jawhar*.[182] Elsewhere, in a letter to his brother, Bar Shennāyā applies the same definition to the term *kiyān* (a loanword into Arabic from the Syriac *kyānā*, meaning 'nature' or 'general substance'). Here, he

[180] *Farāʾid*, ch. 4, §§ 29–30, ch. 5, §§ 27–29.

[181] On this definition of *jawhar*, see Muhammad Legenhausen, 'Ibn Sina's Argument Against God's Being a Substance', in *Substance and Attribute: Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Christian Kanzian and Muhammad Legenhausen (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007), 117–143, esp. 120.

[182] Bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-majālis*, 15–16.

claims that Muslims use the term *jawhar* since no other word in the Arabic language signifies the self-subsistent (*qāʾim bi-nafsihi*), obliging Syriac Christians (*al-suryān*) to use *kiyān* in its place.[183] Bar Shennāyā makes a similar point in his work on providence (mentioned above), stating that every existent is either a general substance (*kiyān ʿāmm*) or a specific individual (*qunūm khāṣṣ*), 'as the rules of logic and the Syriac language stipulate' (*ḥasbamā taqtaḍīhī al-qawānīn al-manṭiqiyya wa-l-lugha al-suryāniyya*). As a self-subsistent being, God's essence must necessarily fall in the former and his hypostases in the latter.[184] Subsequent generations of Christians continued to favour the theological use of the term 'substance', not least because Nicene orthodoxy committed them to the idea of God's substantiality, and to repeatedly affirm it in the face of Muslim criticism.[185] A pertinent example comes from Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*. Here, the maphrian points out that by substance (*ʾūsīya*), Muslims (*mašlmānē*) mean something that possesses a body and occupies a space. However, in line with generations of Syriac and Christian Arabic thinkers, Barhebraeus defines the term as 'that which is not in a subject (*law b-haw d-sīm*) and subsists by virtue of itself (*qāʾem l-yāṯeh*)', and so is rightfully applied to God by Christians.[186] Moreover, citing the Christian Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius (fl. late fifth/early sixth centuries), Barhebraeus refers to the Godhead as 'hidden and super-substantial' (*ʾalāhūṯā gnīztā wa-mʿalyaṯ men ʾūsīya*), which he explains as a substance inaccessible to our senses but a substance all the same.[187] The idea of the unknowability of God's substance also extended to His hypostases, as we shall now see in the following section on ʿAbdīshōʿ's uses of scriptural and patristic testimonia.

3.4 Appeals to Patristic and Scriptural Authority

We have observed that ʿAbdīshōʿ makes ready use of rational proofs when affirming God's properties, attributes, hypostases, and substance. But what of his appeals to patristic and scriptural authority? So far, his approach to the former

[183] Elias bar Shennāyā, *Jawāb ʿan risālat akhīhī Zāhid al-ʿUlamaʾ Abi Saʿid ʿĪsā ibn Manṣur*, in Samir Khalil Samir, 'Un traité nouveau d'Elie de Nisibe sur le sens des mots *kiyān* et *ilāh*', in *Parole de l'Orient* 14 (1987): 109–153, here §32–39.

[184] Bar Shennāyā, *Risāla fī ḥudūth al-ʿālam*, 101.

[185] See Samuel Noble, 'The Doctrine of God's Unity according to ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī', *Parole del'Orient* 37 (2012): 291–301, here 301.

[186] Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre du sanctuaire de Gregoire Abou'lFaradj dit Barhebraeus: Quatrieme Base: de l'Incarnation*, ed. and tr. Joseph Khoury, Patrologia Orientalis 31, fasc. 1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1964), 122 (text), 123 (trans.).

[187] Barhebraeus, *Candélabre: Quatrième Base*, 122–124 (text), 123–125 (trans.). The underlying Greek here is ὑπερούσιος θεαρχία ('super-substantial Godhead') from *On the Divine Names*; see Ps.-Dionysius the Aeropagite, *Dionysius the Aeropagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, tr. CE Rolt (Berwick, ME: Ubis Press, 2004), 4.

has been indirect, relying on previous patristic and Baghdad Aristotelian authorities without ever naming them. As to the latter, ʿAbdīshōʿ only occasionally presents scriptural testimonia. A more explicit use of patristic and scriptural authority comes from his *Durra*, where we encounter an objection from his interlocutor: if Christians mean by the Trinity (*al-thālūth*) 'Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible', or 'Eternal, Wise, and Living', then why call them the 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'? Conversely, if the idea is that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, why, then, do Christians obscure God's triune identity with talk of attributes, properties, and substances? It is in ʿAbdīshōʿ's response to this challenge that scriptural and patristic authority are brought to the fore:

> We say that [our terms for the three Persons], in which there are two advantages (*fāʾidatān*), come from the Lord of the [Christian] law (*rabb al-sharīʿa*). Firstly, He meant them as code (*ramz*) for those concepts (*maʿānī*), so that the ignorant and whoever ought to be kept away from the noble and divine sciences do not discover them. Rather, discovering [their meaning] should be by way of a triad of codes (*tathlīth al-rumūz*), not by way of their literal meaning (*ḥaqīqat al-maʿnā*). Thus, the disclosure of mysteries (*kashf al-asrār*) is forbidden to them. Our Lord hinted at this by saying: 'Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces' (Mat 7:6). The pure Theologus (*scil.*, Gregory of Nazianzus) composed a treatise on how it is not necessary to speak of divine matters at all times and with every person. Secondly, the holy Dionysius [the Areopagite] mentioned: 'If divine matters are expressed in approximate terms (*al-ʿibārāt al-qarība*), then those searching for truths will be motivated to examine them, their causes, and the way in which it is possible to express them through such metaphors. Due to the intensity of their study, therefore, the knowledge of those investigating these things becomes certain, trustworthy, and free of doubt.'[188]

The above passage is an almost word-for-word reproduction from the treatise by Ibn Zurʿa's on divine self-intellection mentioned earlier.[189] As John Watt has pointed out, Ibn Zurʿa 'drew on Dionysius to answer why the Scriptures spoke of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" if the reality embedded in the these expressions was the "Mind, Intelligizing and Thought"[190] of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Λ 9'.[191] It

[188] *Durra*, ch. 4, §§ 103–109. For a discussion of this passage in the context of exegetical esotericism, see Rassi, 'Alchemy in an Age of Disclosure' 555–556.

[189] Ibn Zurʿa, *Risāla*, 10–11.

[190] I.e., what has been referred to in this study as Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible (*ʿāql, ʿāqil, maʿqūl*).

[191] John W. Watt, 'From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in the Syriac Tradition', in *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: the Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, ed. Josef Lössl and John W. Watt (Farnham: Ashgate, 1988), 239–257, here 256.

is also possible that ʿAbdīshōʿ, like Ibn Zurʿa before him, wished to buttress his justification of the Trinity in scriptural and patristic proofs in order to illustrate the compatibility of philosophical exposition with revelation.

The appeal to the Gospels, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Gregory of Nazianzus, together with Jesus's words in Mat 7:6, also explains why it was necessary to speak of God's essence in a symbolic manner. Recall that thinkers like Maimonides criticized those who believed that God could be positively described through essential attributes, favouring instead apophatic terms that described God as what He is not. Among medieval Christian Arab thinkers, the triad of Intellect, Intellecter, and Intelligible served this very purpose. In common with Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna, Arabic-using Christians employed this triad to affirm God's unity by negating His multiplicity, namely by stating that no other being is so free of material attachments.[192] By invoking Pseudo-Dionysius (a foundational figure in Christian apophaticism), Ibn Zurʿa and ʿAbdīshōʿ highlight the need to think about God's essential attributes in negative terms, since His true nature cannot be directly accessed. In an apologetic context, this apophaticism addresses why speaking about God's hypostases through 'codes' (*rumūz*) does not obscure God's oneness but rather guides Christians to the mystery of His triunity. This principle is expressed elsewhere in ʿAbdīshōʿ's oeuvre. At the end of the *Paradise of Eden*'s homily on the Trinity, ʿAbdīshōʿ concludes that referring to God's hypostases through allegories (*pellāʾṯā*) safeguards rather than violates His oneness:

> It is very evident from the demonstration[193]
> of the Essence, Word, and Life,
> that the Trinity does not abolish
> in any way that which is one, as you may suppose.
> Preserve the distinction of hidden things
> by signification of allegories (*buddāqā d-pellāʾṯā*);[194]
> with it I will confound all religions (*deḥlāṯā*)
> that are contrary to those who believe.[195]

As with ʿAbdīshōʿ's other Syriac works, the *Pearl*'s discussion of God's triune nature concludes with a clearer, albeit brief, appeal to revelation. Here, our author cites three passages in support of a biblically attested Trinity. The first is Gen 1:26: 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.' This verse was read by

[192] On the Avicenna's apophaticism regarding God's essential unity, see Aydogan Kars, *Unsaying God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 84–92.

[193] The Syriac reads *ṭāḇ galyā men taḥwīṯā*, erroneously translated by Victor Winnet (*Paradise of Eden*, 18) as 'Revelation is better than logical demonstration'.

[194] Reading *peḏṯā* ('allegory') as plural to conform to ʿAbdīshōʿ's metrical scheme.

[195] *Paradise*, 9.

earlier East Syrian exegetes as an allusion to the Trinity on the basis of God's use of the first-person plural, indicating both a unity of substance and a plurality of hypostases.[196] This appears to have been an interpretation known to Muslim observers. As we noted in our survey of Muslim objections to the Trinity (in Section 3.1), one claim about this verse was that the verb 'let us make' refers not to the hypostases but rather God's use of the 'royal we'. This accusation is directly addressed in the above-mentioned anonymous East Syrian commentary on the Nicene Creed. Here, the author claims that kings use the first-person plural because they are referring to their ministers and servants as well as themselves. God, meanwhile, has no co-equal or (*laysa lahu sharīk fī rubūbatihi*). In any case, the author explains, the use of the first-person plural is a feature of the Arabic language, as the occurrence of the first-person plural (*nūn al-jamʿ*) appears nowhere else in God's reported speech in the Old Testament, which was written in Hebrew and Syriac (*ʿibriyya wa-suryāniyya*).[197] The West Syrian exegete Dionysius bar Ṣalībī also insists that Gen 1.26 is a signification of the three hypostases, arguing that the divine utterance 'let us make' was addressed to the Son and Spirit, not to the angels. Moreover, the fact that God mentions 'man' (*ʾ]nāšā*) and not 'human' (*barnāšā*) indicates that He is speaking of the universal man that is the origin of all mankind; the image, meanwhile, signifies the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit, since the divine likeness resides in the soul, through which Adam received the Holy Spirit.[198]

Perhaps with this hermeneutical framework in mind, ʿAbdīshōʿ adduces the multiple occurrences of the Syriac letter *nūn* in Gen 1:26 (i.e., ***neʿbeḏ*** *ʾ]nāšā b-ṣalma**n** a[y]ḵ dmūṯa**n***) as signification of the Trinity.[199] The unstated premise here is that the common denominator of *nūns* in almost each word represents the hypostases' consubstantiality with the divine essence. ʿAbdīshōʿ's source for this allegorical reading is unclear to me, and I have been unable to find a patristic or late antique antecedent, though earlier writers were known to draw similar

[196] Bar Kōnī, *Liber scholiorum (Seert)*, 2:280 (text); idem, *Livres des scolies (recension de Séert)*, 2:208 (trans.); idem, *Théodore bar Koni (recension d'Urmiah): les collections annexées par Sylvain de Qardu*, ed. and tr. Robert Hespel, CSCO 193–194 (Leuven: Peeters, 1983), 105)text), 75 (trans.); Īshōʿdād of Merv, *Commentaire d'Išoʿdad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament, I: Genèse*, ed. and tr. Jacques-Marie Vosté and Ceslas van den Eynde, CSCO 126, 156 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1950, 1955), 45–49 (text), 47–59 (trans.); anonymous, *Le commentaire dur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22*, ed. and tr. Lucas van Rompay, CSCO 483–484 (Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 20–21 (text), 27–29 (trans.); Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Commentaire sur la Genèse*, ed. and tr. J.C.J. Sanders, CSCO 274–275 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1967), 18 (text); 17–18 (trans.).

[197] Anonymous, *Sharḥ amānat ābāʾ majmaʿ Nīqiya*, 419.

[198] Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *Puššāqʾōrāytā*, Homs, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese 13, 15 (digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, project number SOAH 13); idem, *The Literal Exposition of Genesis*, in Watson Boyes, 'The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Book of Genesis' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1930), 87–88 (trans.).

[199] *Pearl*, 9.

inferences from letters in the Syriac alphabet.[200] It is possible that the reading derives from ʿAbdīshōʿ's own interpretation (considering that he is known to have composed a now lost commentary of the Old and New Testament),[201] though this can only be speculation.

As for other proof-texts, ʿAbdīshōʿ supplies Is 6:3 ('Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty'), asserting—this time in line with known exegetical traditions—that the threefold occurrence of 'holy' in the Trisagion hymn indicates three hypostases, while the occurrence of 'Lord' in the verse attests to the one divine substance.[202] Finally, our author invokes Ps 33:6 ('By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all its hosts by the breath of His mouth'), explaining that the 'word of the Lord' is as an allusion to the Son and the 'breath of His mouth' the Spirit. This interpretation does not occur in standard works of East Syrian exegesis but appears in the *ʾAwṣar rāzē* ('Storehouse of Mysteries'), Barhebraeus's Bible commentary, which, on the authority of Symmachus, connects the verse to the Sonship in the Trinity.[203] Furthermore, the psalm is supplied in the disputation of Timothy I and the *Apology of al-Kindī* as proof for the Trinity's attestation in scripture.[204] It is perhaps owing to Ps 33:6's appearance in such disputational texts that ʿAbdīshōʿ saw fit to include the it in his own apology.

Conclusions

In the foregoing we have noted the various ways in which ʿAbdīshōʿ sets out a coherent exposition of a key Christian tenet. Central to his apologetic scheme has been an affirmation of the Trinity's intrinsic monotheism. This strategy—in which catechesis and apologia are so inextricably intertwined—summarizes a Trinitarian

[200] One finds a play on letters and numbers in the poetry of Ephrem, particularly with regard to the *yōḏ* in Jesus' name. In an acrostic homily, he compares Jesus' name to a bridge from death to life, declaring in one verse: 'By your *yōḏ* I am held'; Ephrem the Syrian, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, ed. and tr, Edmund Beck, CSCO 154–155 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1955), 30 (text), 22 (trans.). In another poem, Ephrem interprets the *yōḏ* as an indication of Jesus' divinity, because its numerical value is ten, the number to which all others ascend before returning to one, just as Jesus restores created beings to life (*mhappeḵ beryāṯā*); idem, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de nativitate (Epiphania)*, ed. and tr. Edmund Beck, CSCO 186–187 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO), 136 (text), 124 (trans.). For similar examples, see Thomas Koonammakkal, 'Ephrem on the Name of Jesus', *Studia Patristica* 33 (1997): 548–555, here 550–551.

[201] *Catalogue*, 130 (text), 235 (trans.).

[202] Bar Kōnī, *Liber scholiorum (Seert)*, 1:261 (text); idem, *Scholies (Séert)*, 1:230 (trans.); idem, *Scholies (Urmiah)*, 71 (text), 50 (trans.); Īshōʿdād of Merv, *Commentaire d'Išoʿdad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament. IV. Isaïe et les Douze*, ed. and tr. Ceslas van den Eynde, CSCO 303–304 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1969), 10–13 (text), 11–12 (trans.).

[203] Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Kṯāḇā d-ʾawṣar rāzē: puššāqā d-ḵollāh ṣūraṯ kṯāḇ hānaw dēn l-ʿattīqtā kēṯ wa-ḥḏaṯā* (Glane/Losser: Dayrā d-Mār Aprēm d-Hōlandā, 2003), 177, col. a.

[204] Timothy the Great, *Timotheos I., ostsyrischer Patriarch: Disputation mit dem Kalifen al-Mahdī*, ed. and tr. Martin Heimgartner (CSCO 631–632; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), §§ 16, 50; Tartar, 'Ḥiwār islāmī-masīḥī', 54.

doctrine that for centuries was considered authoritative by most ecclesial communities under Muslim rule. Since this doctrine came under frequent scrutiny by Muslim and Jewish theologians, it was necessary for Christian authors like ʿAbdīshōʿ to restate it, presenting the fundamentals of Nicene orthodoxy in terms that had long become naturalized within Syriac and Arabic Christian discourse, particularly with regard to the distinction between essential and transitive attributes, the argument for God's triune nature from self-intellection, and the idea of God's being a substance. As such, ʿAbdīshōʿ's endeavours were part of a broader enterprise with a long literary and intellectual history. Like other apologists of the thirteenth century, ʿAbdīshōʿ adduces arguments from the Church Fathers to demonstrate that it was possible to vindicate Christian dogma without entirely resorting to non-Christian theological models. This need not mean, however, that he transmits his Church's Trinitarian doctrine in a passive way. One can detect an Avicennian footprint in his thought, particularly in the language he employs to describe God as a Necessary Being and His generosity as the emanation (lit. 'overflow') of existence without need for recompense. Both are examples of an attempt to resemanticize centuries of Trinitarian thought for a more contemporary readership that might have been au fait with such expressions. Admittedly, he does not exploit Avicenna's famous ontological argument for God's existence, favouring instead teleological speculation. Still, ʿAbdīshōʿ's natural theological proofs, along with his discussions of God's self-intellection, were reflective of an intellectual idiom held in common by Christians and Muslims (though each would reach very different conclusions). Our authors engagement with these ideas should therefore prompt us to consider them as one aspect of a theological *koinē* and shared lettered tradition.

ʿAbdīshōʿ's approaches to Trinitarian dogma in his Syriac and Arabic works are strikingly similar: both are intended to reassure an internal readership that the issues surrounding the doctrine could be resolved on Christianity's own terms as well as by appealing to a common ground. Despite the Trinity's emergence prior to Islam, the *Pearl* contains several arguments conditioned by centuries of Christian–Muslim controversy, much of which took place in the Arabic language. As such, it is impossible to appreciate the *Pearl* as an authoritative *summa* of Nestorian dogma without understanding its apologetic substratum. In the following chapter we will see that this picture becomes rather more complicated in ʿAbdīshōʿ's treatment of Christology, where there are greater divergences (as well as similarities) in his method of exposition.

4

Debating Natures and Persons

ʿAbdīshōʿ's Contribution to Christology

Closely connected to themes of God's unity is the issue of Christology, that is, doctrine relating to the Incarnation and the operation of Christ's divine and human natures. Our main sources for ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christological thought are his *Pearl, Durra, Farāʾid*, and *Profession*, though we also encounter some Christological themes in his *Paradise of Eden* and *Khuṭba*. Considered by Muslims to be a prophet, the figure of Jesus occupied a significant place in Islamic thought by the thirteenth century.[1] However, rejections of Christ's divinity in the Qurʾān—inspired by such verses as Q 5:116 ('Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as gods alongside God"?')—led many Muslim theologians to argue that Christians professed a form of associationism (*shirk*).[2] The persistence of these accusations moved Christian apologists to argue for the reasonableness of the Incarnation, its intrinsic monotheism, and its logical necessity.[3]

As in his Trinitarian thought, the basic structure of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology derives from late antique doctrines. By the advent of Islam in the seventh century, the Church of the East had developed a distinct identity centred on its Christology, which owed much of its formation to the great Antiochene exegete Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), the Great Interpreter (Syr. *mpašqānā rabbā*/Ar. *al-mufassir al-muʿaẓẓam*) of the East Syrian tradition. Central to Theodore's scheme was the idea of two natures (φύσεις) in the Incarnate Christ's single person (πρόσωπον), and that the divine nature united with the *homo assumptus*

[1] For a complete inventory of verses mentioning Jesus in the Qurʾān, see Neal Robinson, 'Jesus', *EQ* 3 (2003): 7–20, here 7. The typological framework for Jesus's prophethood in the Qurʾān is discussed by Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 10–11. For collections of sayings in medieval Sufi texts, particularly by Ghazzālī, Abū Nuʿaym Iṣbahānī, and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), see ibid., 38–43 and 144–207.

[2] Beaumont, *Christology*, 1–11; idem, 'The Christologies of Abū Qurra, Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī and Muslim Response', in *The Routledge Reader in Muslim–Christian Relations*, ed. Mona Siddiqui (London: Routledge, 2013), 49–64, here 58–62. For further affirmations of Christ's prophethood by medieval Muslim authors, see Khoury, *Matériaux*, 4: 179–303.

[3] For brief overviews of apologies from Abū Qurra to ʿAbdīshōʿ, see Landron, *Attitudes*; Harald Suermann, 'The Rational Defence of Christianity within the Context of Islamic Monotheism', in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*, ed. Terrence Merrigan and Jacques Haers (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 273–286. For more detailed surveys to the twelfth century, see Beaumont, *Christology*, 28–171 and Khoury, *Matériaux*, 4:11–176, 6/2:289–335. 6/3:247–411.

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(ληφθεὶς ἄνθρωπος) from Mary, in a process of indwelling (ἐνοίκισης) and conjunction (συνάφεια).[4] Inspired by Theodore's teachings, Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, upheld the title 'Mother of Christ' (Χρηστόκος) for the Virgin, in opposition to that of 'Mother of God' (Θεοτόκος) insisted upon by Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, who is credited with a 'Word–Flesh' Christology whereby two pre-incarnate natures became a single nature.[5] The dispute reached a head at the Council of Ephesus in 431, resulting in the deposition and exile of Nestorius to the Great Oasis in Egypt. Theodore and Nestorius's teachings, however, would find their way into the Syriac-speaking Persian Church of the Sassanian Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries. As a consequence, the Church of the East came to profess two natures (*kyānē*) in Christ's single person (*parṣōpā*).[6] By the early seventh century, it also espoused the doctrine that there subsisted in Christ's person two *qnōmē* (sing. *qnōmā*), that is, the individual manifestations of the two natures: God the Word for the divine and Christ the Man for the human.[7] By making such distinctions between natures and *qnōmē*, the Church of the East safeguarded its Christology against Theopaschitism (the belief that God's divinity suffered with Christ's humanity)—an error of which it accused its Chalcedonian Melkite and Miaphysite Jacobite rivals.[8]

[4] Alfred Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: A&C Black, 1993), 301–309; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, tr. John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), 457–463; Frederick G. Mcleod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia* (London: Routledge, 2009), 34ff. On these terms and their Arabic correspondents, see Treiger, *The Christology of the Letter*, 41.

[5] For a general overview of the controversy at Ephesus and its attendant doctrines, see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 301–309; Mcleod, *Theodore*, 310ff.

[6] On the complex and pluriform transmission of the writings of Theodore and Nestorius—counted among the 'Greek Fathers' (*malpānē yawnāyē*) of the Church of the East—into the East Syrian milieu, see D.S. Wallis-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 117–150; Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 113–125; Gerrit J. Reinink, 'Tradition and the Formation of the "Nestorian" Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq', *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, no. 1–3 (2009): 217–250.

[7] For definitions, see Geevarghese Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1982), 87–89; Sebastian P. Brock, 'The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials', in *Aksum, Thyateira: A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios of Thyateira and Great Britain*, ed. George D. Dragas (London: Thyateira House, 1985), 39–142, here 131; idem, 'The Church of the East in the Sassanian Empire', 82. I have intentionally left the term *qnōmā* untranslated due to misunderstandings among non-East Syrian theologians who read the word as 'hypostasis' or 'person'. This reading resulted in the erroneous belief that the Nestorians profess two persons in Christ (as discussed in further detail below). Among East Syrian writers, however, the Syriac *qnōmā* (lit. 'self') signified the properties and operations of each of Christ's natures, which should not be confused with the persons or hypostases of the Trinity. The avoidance of the translation of *qnōmā* as 'person' or 'hypostases' was first proposed in modern scholarship by Geevarghese Chediath (*The Christology of Mar Babai*, 89), and later upheld by Sebastian Brock ('The Christology of the Church of the East', 131 and 'The Church of the East in the Sassanian Empire', 82).

[8] Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai*, 71ff; Brock, 'The Christology of the Church of the East', 131–132.

In the previous chapter, we observed a uniformity of style and approach in ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian dogma. By comparison, his Christological strategies are more varied. A section of this chapter is devoted to the Syriac *Pearl*'s treatment of intra-Christian differences, which adopts what I refer to as a 'church historical approach' to Christology. As I will show, Christology occupied a central space in Syriac and Arabic Christian articulations of what might be termed a 'primordial past' that shaped a religious community's present identity as well its attitudes to past events.[9] In the case of the *Pearl*, doctrines concerning the divine and human natures of Christ are embedded in formative narratives of pain and trauma caused by schisms at Ephesus. Moreover, the *Pearl* contains an unprecedented measure of rich information about other Christian confessions—likely the result of the Church of the East's contacts with churches beyond its Middle Eastern environs as a result of the global reach of the Mongol Empire. As such, ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology is not simply a bricolage of earlier sources; it was also written with contemporary concerns in mind.

Other sections of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Pearl* have a more anti-Muslim apologetic tenor, as does the bulk of his Arabic Christology. Even his attacks against other Christians—particularly in his Arabic Christology—hint at the presence of a Muslim interlocutor. Although the three main Christological positions first began to emerge in the fifth century, the Arab conquests of the seventh century ushered in an age of Christological disputes linked to anti-Muslim apologetics. For in order to defend the reasonableness of the Incarnation to Muslim critics, apologists highlighted the errors of their Christian adversaries. Such disputes exposed inter-confessional rivalries and attempts to gain Muslim approval, often in the form of official investiture and patronage.[10] Although ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology inherits these strategies, he refrains from attacking rival confessions in his later works despite remaining faithful to the East Syrian Christological tradition. In one work our author even disavows age-old rivalries with other Christian groups, dismissing such division as mere 'partisanship' (*ʿaṣabiyya*). In doing so, ʿAbdīshōʿ reflects some of the ecumenical tendencies of Christian writers of the period, most notably Barhebraeus.[11]

[9] See Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 8ff.

[10] For the struggle of Christian factions under Abbasid rule to be seen as the 'true representatives' of Christianity under Islam, see Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs from the Earliest Time to the Present*, 9th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1968), 354–355, cited in Beaumont, *Christology*, 102. See also Michael G. Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest*, 344ff.

[11] Wolfgang Hage, 'Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology', *The Harp* 4, no. 1–3 (1991): 103–109; Herman G.B. Teule, 'It Is Not Right to Call Ourselves Orthodox and the Others Heretics: Ecumenical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusades', in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context—Contacts—Confrontations: Acta of the Congress Held at Hernen Castle in May 1993, II*, ed. K.N. Cigaar and Herman G.B. Teule (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 13–27. For East Syrian ecumenical attitudes towards the Latin Church, see idem, 'Saint Louis and the East Syrians: the Dream

As to more direct responses to Muslim—and to some extent Jewish—criticisms of the Incarnation, ʿAbdīshōʿ follows a 'reason-revelation' scheme whereby scripture is advanced alongside appeals to philosophical reasoning. In doing so, he attempts to educate a Christian readership about the fundamentals of the Incarnation while convincing hypothetical critics of its soundness. In addition to biblical testimonia, our author provides Qurʾānic passages as proof of Jesus's divinity, thus following in the footsteps of earlier Christian who sought a Christological framework in the scripture of an opposing faith.[12] Thus, a close reading of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology reveals the intrinsically apologetic function of his theology and its importance to the Church's catechetical activities. As for the philosophical dimension of his Christology, ʿAbdīshōʿ inherits the approaches of earlier apologists, namely the Christian Aristotelians of the Abbasid period whose legacies. As we shall see in this chapter, the influence of medieval thinkers such as Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Elias bar Shennāyā are every bit as important to ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology as the Greek and Syrian fathers of Late Antiquity.

4.1 Some Notable Muslim and Jewish Objections to the Incarnation

It is first necessary to identify some salient criticisms that Christian apologists frequently faced in the two centuries or so leading up to ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime. Where the Incarnation is concerned, the main points of contention that had arisen by the late thirteenth century were as follows. First, that Christ's divinity is nowhere attested in revelation, while any claim to the contrary is the result of wilful misinterpretation. Second, was the association of the Incarnation with Islamic heresies, namely *ḥulūliyya* ('incarnationism') and *tashbīh* ('anthropomorphism'), which were considered *odia theologica* by many Muslim theologians.[13] And third, that the very

of a Terrestrial Empire', in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context—Contacts—Confrontations: Acta of the congress Held at Hernen Castle in May 1993, III*, eds. K.N. Cigaar and Herman G.B. Teule (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 202–222; Salam Rassi, 'Between *ʿaṣabiyya* and Ecumenism: ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā's Attitudes to Other Christians', *Syriac in Its Multi-Cultural Context: First International Syriac Studies Symposium, Mardin Artuklu University, Institute of Living Languages, 20–22 April 2012, Mardin*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 169–186.

[12] Syriac and Arabic Christian encounters with the Qurʾān and Qurʾānic themes occurred as early as the early eighth century, most notably in the the Baḥīrā legend in the *sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 761/2?) and later versions, in which a Christian monk confirms Muḥammad's prophecy. Syriac and Christian Arabic versions of this narrative reinterpret various Qurʾānic passages to conform to Christian doctrines and practices. See Barbara Roggema, 'A Christian Reading of the Qurʾān: The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā and its use of Qurʾān and *sīrā*', in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 57–73. Other Christian encounters with the Qurʾān are addressed below, Section 4.3.2.

[13] Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Islam* (New York: SUNY Press, 1985), 122; Daniel Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme: les anthropomorphismes de la sunna et leur interprétation par les théologiens* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

notion of Incarnation defied the rules of the physical world, thus constituting an ontological fallacy. But before proceeding, it is necessary to point out that it was common for Muslim polemicists to outline the three main Christological positions—Jacobite, Melkite, and Nestorian—before refuting each of them. Since this study focuses on a figure from the Church of the East, I have chosen to limit my discussion to their critique of Nestorian Christology.

The author of the Pseudo-Ghazālian *al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyyat ʿĪsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-Injīl* (ca. twelfth century) begins his attack on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation with a critique of Christian salvation history. Here, he reports that all Christians agree that humankind was punished for Adam's disobedience (*bi-sabab ʿiṣyān abīhim Ādam*), which necessitated the sending of the prophets and, ultimately, God's noble sacrifice (*fidāʾ karīm*) of Himself in order to redeem them. In order to achieve this goal, He incarnated Himself by uniting with Jesus's humanity (*ittaḥada bi-nāsūt ʿĪsā*)—a claim the author condemns as violating God's transcendent majesty.[14] The author then goes on to discuss the three classical Christological positions: the Jacobites profess a uniting of mingling (*imtizāj*) and mixture (*ikhtilāṭ*) in the manner of body and soul, resulting in a third being possessing all the qualities of God and Man;[15] the Melkites claim that the union resulted in two separate and distinct realities, i.e., natures (*ḥaqīqatayn mutamayyizatayn*), each retaining their divine and human properties in a single *qunūm* (from the Syr. *qnōmā*; also rendered *qunūm* in Arabic) that united with the universal human (*al-insān al-kullī*);[16] and the Nestorians adhere to a uniting of volition (*mashīʾa*).[17] In refutation of the Nestorians, the author asserts that, if by a 'uniting of volition' they mean that Christ's volition was subject to God, he would be no different from the prophets and saints. But if the Christians mean that Christ's volition was *identical* to God's, then they would be contradicting verses

[14] Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-jamīl*, 132 (text), 133 (trans.). Gabriel Said Reynolds ('The Ends of the *al-Radd al-jamīl* and its Portrayal of Christian Sects', *Islamochristiana* 25 [1999]: 45–65, here 55) believes that *al-Radd al-jamīl*'s discussion of Christian salvation history is proof of the author's former Christian faith, since the topic is 'exceedingly rare' in earlier anti-Christian polemics, though he cites Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) as exceptions. While the topic might be rare, *al-Radd al-jamīl* is by no means the first Muslim refutation of Christianity to address it. It is found, for example, in a work by the Zaydī imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrahīm al-Rassī (d. 860), *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, ed. Imām Ḥanafī ʿAbdallah (Cairo: Dār al-Afâq al-ʿArabiyya, 1420/2000), 37–39, as well as the polemics of subsequent writers, namely, al-Qarāfī and Ibn Taymiyya (on whom more below). Furthermore, the related Christian doctrine of divine deception was equally known to these writers and others, as will be addressed further on.

[15] Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, 36 (text), 37 (trans.). For the analogy of the body's uniting with the soul in Jacobite thought, cf. Joseph Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien: étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'église jacobite* (Louvain: Excudebat Josephus van Linthout, 1909), 189.

[16] Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, 138 (text), 139 (trans.).

[17] Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, 146 (text), 147 (trans.). What is meant here is the mutual operation of the divine and human wills in Christ's person, as opposed to the prophets and saints whose will and volition were subordinate to God's. This issue will be discussed in further detail below in Section 4.2.2.

from the Gospels, namely when Christ prayed to God before the Crucifixion in Mk 14:36 or when he called out to God in Mk 16:34.[18]

Another way in which the author of the *al-Radd al-jamīl* attacks the Christine doctrine of Christ's divinity is by comparing it to the Muslim heresy of *ḥulūliyya*. In particular, he likens Christians to Sufis who were condemned for ecstatic utterances (*shaṭḥiyyāt*) of their unification with God, citing as examples Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (executed 922), who declared himself 'the Real' (*anā l-Ḥāqq*), and Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 846 or 875), who pronounced such statements as 'How great is my affair' (*mā aʿẓam shaʾnī*).[19] It is noteworthy that the same argument is employed several times by al-Ghazālī throughout his authentic works, which repeatedly warn against the excesses of ecstatic Sufis who claim *ḥulūl* upon reaching a state of self-annihilation (*fanāʾ*), such that they are unable to distinguish the vision of the divine from their own humanity.[20] In a further three passages al-Ghazālī explicitly compares the excesses of al-Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, though this time by invoking what Alexander Treiger refers to as 'mirror Christology'.[21] According to this scheme, the gnostic receives genuine visions of the divine which appear as light reflected onto a polished mirror (*miʾāt majluwwa*), but is misinterpreted by them as *actual* union with God, much as the Christians believe about Christ.[22]

The Ashʿarite thinker Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī also affirms the impossibility of God's union and indwelling in created beings in his dogmatic and philosophical works.[23] In a *kalām* work entitled *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī's critique is predicated on an atomistic conception of created reality. Accordingly, indwelling, or inherence, is understood as the inherence of an accident (*ʿaraḍ*) in a physical substrate (*maḥall*).[24] He begins by ascribing a theory of *ḥulūl* to all Christians,[25] and

[18] Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, 146 (text), 147 (trans.).

[19] Ps.-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, 148 (text), 149 (trans.).

[20] See, for example, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 5 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktaba Tawfīqiyya, n.d.), 2:441, 3:556, 4:424; idem, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badāwī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1383/1964), 109–110; idem, *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964), 207, cited and translated by Alexander Treiger, 'Al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology" and Its Possible East Syriac Sources', *Muslim World* 101 (2011): 698–713, here 700–701. See also Muhammad Abul Quasem, 'al-Ghazālī's evaluation of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and his Disapproval of the Mystical Concepts of Union and Fusion', *Asian Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1993): 143–164.

[21] Treiger, 'Al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology"'.

[22] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 2:411, 3:556; idem, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, 116, quoted and translated in Treiger, 'al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology"', 702–703. Treiger demonstrates that al-Ghazālī's 'mirror Christology' has precedence in the writings of the eighth-century East Syrian mystic John of Dalyāthā, who taught that the vision of God is reflected through the soul, like light in a polished mirror, and was accessible not only to Christ but also to all humans. Ibid., 704–713.

[23] On these, see Muammer Iskenderoglu, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī', *CMR* 4 (2012): 61–65, here 62.

[24] See ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshār (Alexandria: Munshaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1969), 281; Louis Massignon and Georges C. Anawati, 'Ḥulūl', *EI*^{2} 3 (1966): 570–571; Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, 25.

[25] Although mainly associated with Theodore of Mopsuestia and his theology, the term 'indwelling' is also found in non-East Syrian Christian Arabic writers. This is hardly surprising since the term

considers that had God inhered in something, it would either imply the temporal creation of an inherer (*ḥudūth al-ḥāll*) or the pre-eternity of a physical substrate (*qidam al-maḥall*). Both are absurd because God is neither subject to temporal creation nor can a physical substrate pre-exist Him.[26] He then turns to the doctrine of uniting (*ittiḥād*), arguing that

> if two definitive entities (*thābitayn*) unite, then they are two [in number], not one. If they cease to exist (*ʿadamā*), then the result (*ḥāṣil*) is something other than them (i.e., a *tertium quid*). If one remains and the other ceases to exist, then uniting is impossible, because the existent would not be the same as the non-existent (*lā yakūnu ʿayn al-maʿdūm*).[27]

In a compendium of philosophy and theology entitled the *Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī makes similar arguments against indwelling and uniting though without explicitly mentioning Christianity.[28] In his commentary of this work, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī remarks that the doctrine of divine union and indwelling is professed by Christians and certain Sufis (*baʿḍ ahl al-taṣawwuf*).[29]

Arguments against the Incarnation also occur in a disputation text featuring al-Rāzī, in which the famous theologian debates an unnamed Christian in Khwārazm. In reply to the claim that Christ is God, al-Rāzī makes the basic distinction between God, a Necessary Being by virtue of Himself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*), and Jesus, an individual man (*al-shakhṣ al-basharī*) subjected to a range of human experiences, such as living and dying, eating and drinking, childhood and adulthood, etc. As such, that which is temporally created (*muḥdath*) cannot be pre-existing (*qadīm*), that which is subsistent (*muḥtāj*) cannot be self-subsistent (*ghanī*), and that which is contingent (*mumkin*) cannot

appears in Jn 1:14 ('The Word became flesh and made Its dwelling among us') and is employed by John Chrysostom (d. 407), an important Church Father to all three Christological traditions; see Melvin Edward Lawrenz, 'The Christology of John Chrysostom' (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1987), 199. The term is also employed by the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra (*Mayāmīr Thāwdūrūs Abī Qurra usquf Ḥawrān: aqdam taʾlīfʿarabī naṣrānī*, ed. Constantin Bacha [Beirut: Maṭbaʿat al-Fawāʾid, 1904], 73) and the Copt Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (*Réfutation d'Eutychius par Sévère Evéque d'Aschmounain [Le Livre des Conciles]*, ed. Paul Chébli, Patrologia Orientalis 3, fasc. 2 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1983], 189 and *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī īḍāḥ al-dīn*, ed. Murqus Girgis [Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Jadīda, 1925], 115). The later Copto-Arabic author Ibn al-Kabar (d. 1324), however, rejects the term as heterodox; Shams al-Riʾāsa abū al-Barakāt ibn al-Kabar, *Livre de la lampe des ténèbres et de l'exposition (lumineuse) du service (de l'Église)*, ed. and tr. Louis Villecourt, Patrologia Orientalis 20, fasc. 4 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1929), 647.

[26] al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn*, 1:165.

[27] al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn*, 1:166. The Avicennan context of this argument and its implications for Christian apologetics are explored below, in Section 4.3.3.

[28] Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-mutaʾakhkhirīn min al-ḥukamāʾ wa-l-mutakallimīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1411/1991), 225.

[29] Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-muḥaṣṣal: bi-inẓimām-i rasāʾil va-favāʾid-i kalāmī*, ed. ʿAbdallāh Nūrānī (Tehran: Silsilah-i Dānish-i Īrānī, 1359/1980), 260.

be necessary (*wājib*).[30] Moreover, since God is neither body nor accident, his inherence in a created entity would be impossible. For if he were a body, His inherence in another would entail differing parts (*ikhtilāf ajzāʾihi*), while if he were an accident, He would require a physical substrate (*maḥall*) in which to subsist. Al-Rāzī dismisses both as absurd and sheer unbelief (*maḥḍ al-kufr*), since a unitary and transcendent being cannot logically fall under either.[31]

At this point in the disputation, it becomes clear that al-Rāzī's purpose is not solely to attack Christianity. By drawing attention to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, al-Rāzī also polemicizes against various Islamic sects he deems equally objectionable. Thus his Christian opponent posits that some Muslims believe it possible for God to possess a body, citing as examples 'anthropomorphists' (*ṭawāʾif mujassima mushabbiha*) who are inspired by instances in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* in which God occupies a throne and descends to earth every night.[32] To these he adds Muslim groups that teach *ḥulūlī* doctrines such as unnamed Shīʿīs (*rafāwiḍ*) who believe that God indwelled Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn,[33] together with al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī, who made ecstatic pronouncements of their divine union. Al-Rāzī simply responds that those professing *ḥulūl* cannot be considered Muslims (*laysū hum minnā ḥaqīqatan*). Rather, they are little more than charlatans who deceive Muslims by behaving in an ascetic manner (*aẓhara li-l-nās annahuʿalā ṭarīq al-ṣiddīqīn*) while secretly desiring the favour of earthly rulers (*fī al-bāṭin ḥarīṣ ʿalā ṣuḥbat al-mulūk wa-l-salāṭīn*).[34]

Although written from a Jewish polemical perspective, Ibn Kammūna's (d. 1284) arguments against the Incarnation follow the pattern of earlier Muslim refutations of Christianity.[35] In conformity with such works, he outlines the Christological creeds of the three main sects: the Jacobites believe that the union (*ittiḥād*) of the Word with Jesus took place through the mingling (*imtizāj*) and mixture (*ikhtilāṭ*) of the two natures, resulting in a single nature (*jawhar wāḥid*); the Nestorians maintain that the Word 'made Christ's humanity a temple and clad

[30] Fakhr al-Dīn ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Munāẓara fī radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Najjār (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986), 22–21.

[31] al-Rāzī, *Munāẓara*, 24.

[32] al-Rāzī, *Munāzara*, 31–36. Cf., for instance, Q 2:255: 'His Throne (*kursiyyuhu*) extends over the heavens and the earth'; 9:129: 'He is Lord of the Throne (*rabb al-ʿarsh al-ʿaẓīm*)'; and 40:15: '[He is God], Owner of High Ranks and Degrees, the Owner of the Throne (*dhū al-ʿarsh*)'. See Cl. Huart and J. Sadan, 'Kursī', *EI²* 5 (1986): 509 and Jamal Elias, 'Throne', *EQ* 5 (2006): 276–278. For other instances, including ones from *ḥadīth*, see Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme*, 76–89 and 90–102.

[33] al-Rāzī, *Munāẓara*, 33. In his *Iʿtiqādāt firaq al-muslimīn wa-l-mushrikīn* (ed. ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshār [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1982/1402], 73), al-Rāzī states that the first Muslims to espouse the doctrine of *ḥulūl* were the Shīʿīs, who claimed it regarding their imāms (*awwal man aẓhara hādhihi al-maqāla fī al-islām al-rafāwiḍ fa-innahum iddaʿaw al-ḥulūl fī al-ḥaqq aʾimmatihim*).

[34] Al-Rāzī, *Munāẓara*, 46. To this effect, al-Rāzī cites the prophet Muḥammad as saying, 'Whoever betrays us is not one of us (*man khānanā fa-laysa minnā*); cf. prophetic *ḥadīth*, 'Whoever deceives us is not one of us (*man ghashshanā fa-laysa minnā*), on which see ibid, 46, no. 59.

[35] See Sydney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 73–74; Barbara Roggema, 'Ibn Kammūna and Ibn al-ʿIbrī's Response to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs of Prophethood', *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 2 (2014): 193–213.

Itself in his humanity' (*jaʿalathu haykalan wa-ddaraʿathu adrāʿan*), resulting in two natures and two *qunūms*; and the Melkites believe the union to have taken place in the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kullī*), resulting in an incarnate Christ who was two in nature and one in *qunūm*.[36] Ibn Kammūna rejects the notion that the divine and human natures could possibly unite, regardless of how Christians claim this union to have occurred. As in al-Rāzī *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn* (discussed above), Ibn Kammūna makes an important distinction between the modalities of existent (*mawjūd*) and non-existent (*maʿdūm*) in the act of uniting:

> As for uniting, this is inconceivable because if two things unite, they either become (i) two existents; (ii) two non-existents; (iii) or one existent and one non-existent. Now, if they become two existents, they have not united because they are two, not one. If they both cease to exist, they do not become one but rather cease to be and a *tertium quid* is generated (*ḥadatha al-thālith*). And if one ceases to exist and the other remains, then it is clear that this is not uniting.[37]

In response to the Nestorians in particular, Ibn Kammūna argues that if the divine nature were pre-existent (*qadīm*) and the human nature temporally created (*muḥdath*), then the object of worship (*maʿbūd*) would be as much created as it is pre-existing, insofar as Christians claim Christ to be the sum of both. Since monotheistic worship must be reserved for the pre-existent (*yajib an tatamaḥḥaḍa al-ʿibāda li-l-qadīm*), Christ's humanity must be excluded.[38] Ibn Kammūna also takes issue with the claim that the Incarnation was motivated by God's desire to save mankind, since it implies that He was incapable (*lam yastaṭiʿ*) of doing so until He descended to earth.[39] As for humankind's redemption from sin, Ibn Kammūna points out that Satan continued to misguide humankind after Christ's advent, as attested by the slaying and humiliation of the apostles.[40]

Similarly, in his *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya*, al-Iskandarānī attacks the Incarnation's broader salvation narrative, charging Christians with maintaining that an almighty and transcendent deity failed to save humankind (*yaʿjazu ʿalā khalāṣihim*) until He descended from heaven and incarnated Himself.[41] Al-Qarāfī also accuses Christians of degrading God's omnipotence. In his *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira*, he asserts that God, owing to His eternal majesty, guides humankind by sending prophets. What, then, could have motivated Him to descend into the depths of human existence? Such a descent would entail impregnating Mary, lingering in her womb while plunged in placenta (*labatha bi-l-arḥām munghasiman fī al-mashīma*), until birthed, raised as a

[36] Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 52–53 (text); idem, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination*, 80–81 (trans.).
[37] Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 54–55 (text); idem, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination*, 83 (modified trans.). Cf. al-Rāzī's rejection of union, discussed above. As with al-Rāzī's refutation of uniting, the Avicennan background of this theory will be discussed below, in Section 4.3.3.
[38] Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 56 (text); idem, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination*, 86 (trans.).
[39] Cf. Pseudo-Ghazālī's rejection of salvation history (discussed above).
[40] Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 57 (text); idem, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination*, 87 (trans.).
[41] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 100.

human child and, finally, crucified as an adult—all of which indicates that the Christians worship a wretched God (*ilāh miskīn*).[42]

Further on in the same work, al-Qarāfī directs his polemic against his interlocutor's New Testament proofs, most notably Jn 20:17 ('I am ascending to my Father and your Father; my God and your God'), a verse that had become a major point of contention in Christological discussions between Muslims and Christians by the thirteenth century.[43] He accuses Christians of wilfully neglecting the clauses 'your Father' and 'your God' in Jn 20:17. For al-Qarāfī, the passage is clear proof that Jesus did not share in God's divinity; rather, he had a god whom he worshipped and who guided him (*lahu ilāh yaʿbuduhu wa-rabb yudabbiruhu*).[44] According to al-Qarāfī, Christ's use of 'my Father' is simply a metaphor (*majāz*), for in Jn 1:13, the Jews are referred to as 'Children of God', who he interprets as those whom God favoured, as opposed to literal sons of God. He supplies further support for this reading from Mat 12:46–50 in which Christ declares all who follow the will of his Father to be his mothers and brothers. And yet, al-Qarāfī concludes, Christians fail to grasp the simple meaning of this metaphor and instead insist that Christ possessed a divine nature.[45]

Opposition to the Incarnation is no less forceful in the polemical works of Ibn Taymiyya. In his *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, he addresses the claim in the *Letter from the People of Cyprus* that God never spoke to humankind except from behind a veil (*illā min warāʾ ḥijāb*), according to what it says in Qurʾān,[46] and since subtle substances (*laṭāʾif*) can only manifest in solid forms (*kathāʾif*), it was necessary for God the Word to appear as Jesus in order to address humankind.[47] Ibn Taymiyya replies that if Christians mean to say that the Word is a divine attribute, then Christ the man cannot have been God, since an attribute cannot be other than what it describes (*lā taqūmu bi-ghayr mawṣūfihā*). Moreover, the attribute of the Word is not itself God the Creator (*al-ṣifa laysat ilāhan khāliqan*) but an attribute. Its uniting with humanity, therefore, does not make Jesus divine.[48]

As for his critique of divine indwelling, he turns to the *Letter*'s statement that God appeared (*ẓahara*) in Christ because humankind is the most exalted of His creations.[49] In reply, Ibn Taymiyya argues that this manifestation was in fact an intellective representation (*mithāl ʿilmī*) of Jesus's faith and remembrance

[42] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 293.

[43] See Mark Beaumont, 'Muslim Readings of John's Gospel in the ʿAbbasid Period', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 19, no. 2 (2011): 179–197, with focus on al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī, Abū Muḥammad ibn Ḥazm, and the author of the *al-Radd al-jamīl*.

[44] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 289–290.

[45] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 291.

[46] Q 42:51: 'It is not for any human that God speak to him except by revelation (*waḥyan*) or from behind a veil (*ḥijāb*).'

[47] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:308 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 285–286 (trans.); Ebied and Thomas, *Christian-Muslim Polemic*, 96 (text), 97 (trans.).

[48] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:309–310 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 286 (trans.).

[49] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:332 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 288 (trans.); Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 98 (text), 99 (trans.).

of God, as opposed to the indwelling of God's essence in his humanity.[50] In support, Ibn Taymiyya alludes to Q 30:28 ('He presents to you an example [*mathalan*] of yourselves') and advances *ḥadiths* in which Muḥammad reports God's words: 'When I love him (i.e., My servant) I am his hearing by which he hears, his seeing by which he sees' and 'In Me he hears, in Me he sees, in Me he touches, in Me he walks.'[51] In line with earlier polemicists, Ibn Taymiyya discredits the Incarnation by comparing the doctrine to Islamic heresies, as occurs in his comparison of indwelling to the errors of Sufis who proclaim union with the divine.[52] Later in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, he likens this doctrine to that of the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), taught by the celebrated Sufi thinker Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240). According to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿArabī espoused a pantheistic conception of God, and cites him as having declared: 'Transcendent Truth is the creation that resembles it' (*al-ḥaqq al-munazzah huwa al-khalq al-mushabbah*),[53] 'the Truth has a face in everything that is worshiped' (*li-l-Ḥaqq fī kull maʿbūd wajhan*), and 'there is no worshipper other than God in anything that is worshiped' (*lā ʿabd ghayr Allāh fī kull maʿbūd*).[54] For Christians, reasons Ibn Taymiyya, such statements would apply to the created humanity of Christ in whom they believe God united and dwelled. These arguments also emerge in his *fatwā* on the issue of Jesus as Word of God in the Qurʾān, which polemicizes against Christians who cite such instances in defence of the Incarnation (specific examples of which will be addressed below, Section 4.3.2). In this *fatwā*, Ibn Taymiyya accuses both Christians and Sufis for failing to adequately distinguish between God and the created world.[55]

4.2 The Intra-Christian Context

Having surveyed some key aspects of polemics against the Incarnation, we now turn to ʿAbdīshōʿ's exposition of the doctrine. The first part of this section addresses ʿAbdīshōʿ's articulation of Christology in opposition to other Christian

[50] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:337–338 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 288 (trans.).
[51] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:334–335 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 289 (trans.).
[52] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 3:337 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 291 (trans.).
[53] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 4:300 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 317 (trans.).
[54] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 4:300–305 (text), idem, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 317–319 (trans.). The latter two quotations are from Ibn ʿArabī's explanation of Q 71:22: 'They have plotted an almighty plot' (*makarū makran kubbāran*). It should be noted that the pantheism ascribed to Ibn ʿArabī was not in fact taught by him. Ibn ʿArabī' conceived of being (*wujūd*) as the existence of no Real Being except God, while if things other than God appear to exist, it is because He has granted them being—a notion akin to Avicenna's argument that all being is contingent save for the Necessary Being. See discussion in William C. Chittick, 'Taṣawwuf. 1. Ibn al-ʿArabī and after in the Arabic and Persian Lands and Beyond', *EI*^{3} 10 (2000): 317–324; idem, 'Waḥdat al-wujūd', *EI*^{2} 11 (2002): 37–39. The views of Ibn ʿArabī and his interpreters on divine union (*ittiḥād*) will be examined below, in Section 4.2.3.
[55] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *Taḥqīq al-qawl fī masʾalat ʿĪsā kalimat Allāh wa-l-Qurʾān kalām Allāh* (Tanta, Egypt: Dār al-Ṣaḥāba li-l-Turāth, 1312/1992). For a summary of the *fatwā*'s contents, see Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya', 852–853.

confessions. In his *Pearl*, our author gives a narrative account of how and why the ancient divisions between Christians arose—a strategy I refer to as a 'church historical approach'. Embedded in this narrative is a refutation of two rival Christologies: the 'Word–Flesh' Miaphysitism of the Jacobites and the hypostatic union of the Diophysite Melkites. In refuting these doctrines, ʿAbdīshōʿ simultaneously addresses themes of ecclesial identity and self-definition of which Christology formed a crucial part. While this particular section of the *Pearl* reflects more intra-religious than inter-religious concerns, an examination of its contents will shed light on how ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christological terminology would later develop in response to non-Christian challenges.

The second part of this section addresses ʿAbdīshōʿ's approach to intra-Christian polemics in his later writings composed in Arabic. Beginning with a close reading of his *Profession*, I show that his Arabic Christology bears the imprint of anti-Muslim apologetics. Although the *Profession* appears solely concerned with rival Christian confessions, it is nevertheless indebted to apologies intended to convince hypothetical Muslim critics that the Christology of the Church of the East was more coherent than others. In a later Arabic work by ʿAbdīshōʿ, we encounter a more conciliatory tone towards other Christians. In this section, I show that by creatively adapting a Christological idiom that had long been defined in opposition to other Christians, our author produces an explanation of the Incarnation that is strikingly tolerant of other expressions.

4.2.1 The *Pearl*'s Church-Historical Approach

The *Pearl* is by no means the first work of East Syrian Christian provenance to weave dogma with historical narrative. We encounter the strategy in Elias bar Shennāyā's *al-Burhān ʿalā ṣaḥīḥ al-īmān* ('The Demonstration of the Correct Faith'), a much-neglected work which contests the narratives of the ecumenical councils in the histories of the Melkite Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq and the Copt Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ,[56] followed by a deconstruction of the Melkite and Miaphysite positions.[57] A further example comes from ʿAmr ibn Mattā's *Kitāb al-majdal*, a vast

[56] Saʿīd ibn Biṭrīq, *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini annales/Kitāb al-tārīkh al-majmūʿ ʿalā al-taḥqīq wa-l-taṣdīq*, ed. Louis Cheikho et al., 2 vols., CSCO 50–51 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1906, 1909), 2:156ff; Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Réfutation d'Eutychius*, 167ff.

[57] This is work has yet to be edited. I consult here Elias bar Shennāyā, *al-Burhān ʿalā ṣaḥīḥ al-īmān*, Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana ar. 180, ar. 180r–220r. For a translation, see Elias bar Shennāyā, *Des Metropoliten Elias von Nisibis Buch vom Beweis der Wahrheit des Glaubens*, tr. L. Horst (Colmar: Eugen Barth, 1886). A critical edition and English translation are forthcoming from Bishara Ebied.

theological *summa* that features a history of the Church councils and the Nestorian controversy.[58] Despite being written in Syriac, ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Pearl* follows in the footsteps of these earlier authors by incorporating such narratives into a broader theological project.

Before touching on the Christological councils, ʿAbdīshōʿ begins by speaking of the tranquillity and unity of faith established by the apostles in the first four centuries after Christ's death.[59] This cohesion, he continues, would be disrupted by the appearance of Arianism, the first significant heresy which resulted in the convocation of the Council of Nicaea in 325 by Constantine.[60] Yet the heresy of Arianism is not mentioned by name. Instead, ʿAbdīshōʿ directs his reader to the ecclesiastical history of Eusebius of Caesarea, from which 'the number of blasphemies, impieties and villainies that existed in this period is known'.[61] The emergence of these heretical divisions on the eve of Nicaea is said to be the work of Satan, and the factionalization of the Christian oikumene is likened to the biblical Fall.[62] At this point, our author ends his brief historical notice of Nicaea by reporting that once the leaders of these heresies had been removed, Christendom was once again 'one opinion and one Church (*reʿyānā ḥaḏ w-ʿedtā ḥḏā*), from where the sun rises to where it sets'.[63]

The lack of detail in ʿAbdīshōʿ's historical sketch of Nicaea is noteworthy. When mentioning heresies, he undoubtedly refers to the Arian controversy over the Trinity. Yet he passes such early Christian heresies in silence and instead assures his readers that all they need to know is contained in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, a work that had enjoyed an long reception and wide Christian readership by ʿAbdīshōʿ's time.[64] It is likely that this passing reference to Eusebius serves an important doctrinal function: although he deems Nicaea historically relevant, details about its main actors do not bear mention because 'there is no disagreement (*layt pullāḡ*) between Christians [today] over the confession of the Trinity', insofar as they all accept the Nicene Creed and the consubstantiality of God's triune persons. Instead, it is over the Incarnated Word (*meṭṭol melṭā d-meṭbarnāšūṭā*) that differences begin to emerge.[65] The assertion that a period

[58] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 472rff. This section forms the sixth part (*faṣl*) of the fifth chapter (*bāb*). It is *not* to be confused with the fifth section of the same chapter, which comprises the patriarchal history, the only part of the entire *Kitāb al-majdal* to published so far (Ibn Mattā, *Akhbār faṭārikat al-mashriq*).

[59] Here, he tells us that 'they the Apostles taught the inhabitants of the world blessedness (*ṭaybūṭā*), holiness (*qaddīšūṭā*), serenity (*nīḥūṭā*), and humility (*makkīḵūṭā*), and the world was filled with knowledge of the Lord, just as water covers the sea'. *Pearl*, 23.

[60] *Pearl*, 23–24. [61] *Pearl*, 24.

[62] *Pearl*, 23: 'The Evil One grew jealous and bitter. And just as he did with Adam, so too he does with us' (*ḥāsem bīšā w-meṭmarmar ʾa[y]ḵ ʿam ʾĀḏām ʾāp ʿamman sāʿar*).

[63] *Pearl*, 24.

[64] Our earliest manuscript of the Syriac version of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* is a St Petersburg codex dated 462. For the lasting impact of Eusebius on the genre of ecclesiastical history in Syriac literature, see Muriel Debié, 'L'héritage de la chronique d'Eusèbe dans l'historiographie syriaque', *Journal of the Canadian Society of Syriac Studies* 6 (2006): 18–28.

[65] *Pearl*, 24.

of ecumenical calm preceded Christianity's historical divisions is a commonplace in Syriac historical works. In Book 14 of the *Kṯāḇ rēš mellē* ('Book of Main Points') by John bar Penkāyē (fl. late seventh century), for example, we also encounter the notion that a pristine period of doctrinal unity prevailed just prior to the appearance of Christological divisions.[66] As for Arabic Christian historiographical traditions, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and Bar Shennāyā, for example, agree that tranquillity reigned throughout the oikumene until the appearance of the first Christological controversy, Macedonianism, declared heretical at the First Council of Constantinople in 381.[67] Moreover, that Christians were united in the Trinity but divided over Christology is a point frequently acknowledged in medieval expositions of Christological dogma,[68] including those by Muslim and Jewish authors.[69]

Once setting the scene of his narrative, ʿAbdīshōʿ reports that a council at Ephesus was convoked to discuss 'the manner (*znāh*) of the union (*ḥḏāyūṯā*) and the terms (*šmāhē*) describing it', after Cyril of Alexandria had claimed that the Virgin was 'Mother of God' (*yāldaṯ' Alāhā*) and condemned any who distinguished (*mparreš*) between Christ's humanity and divinity.[70] In response, Nestorius argued that Cyril's teachings were without prophetic and apostolic foundation, since the expression 'Mother of Man' resembles the doctrines of the heresiarchs Paul of Samosata and Photinus of Galatia, who posited that Christ was a 'mere man' (*barnāšā šḥīmā*). Meanwhile, the appellation 'Mother of God' results in the error of Simon Magus and Paul Menander, who taught that God did not assume (*nsaḇ*) humanity from Mary, but that this humanity was merely phantasmal (*ba-šraḡrāḡyāṯā hwāṯ*).[71] This heresiological distinction is almost identical to that employed by Nestorius in his *Book of Heraclides* (translated from Greek into Syriac in the sixth century) and Babai the Great's (d. 628) *Kṯāḇa da-ḥḏāyūṯā* ('The Book of Union'), each of whom regarded the term 'Mother of Christ' as a critical middle ground between two Christological extremes.[72]

[66] John bar Penkāyē, *Kṯāḇ rēš mellē*, in Alphonse Mingana, *Sources syriaques, Vol. 1* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1908), 134–135. Here, the author states that the tranquillity (*šaynā*) of Theodosius' reign moved Satan to devise ways of enticing Christians away from orthodoxy. Since he failed to do so with polytheism (*saggīʾūṯ ʾalāhē*) and the heresies of Marcion and Bardayṣān, Satan bided his time until the opportunity presented itself in the person of Cyril of Alexandria.

[67] Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Réfutation d'Eutychius par Sévère*, 163–164; Bar Shennāyā's *al-Burhān*, 147r (text), idem, *Buch vom Beweis der Wahrheit des Glaubens*, 27–28 (trans.).

[68] Al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Ṭ'tiqād al-firaq al-thalāth al-yaʿqūbiyya wa-l-malikiyya wa-l-nasṭūriyya wa-man wāfaqahum ʿalā ṭ'tiqādihim*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 8, §§ 4–43, here 4–5; Būlus al-Anṭakī, *al-Farq bayn al-naṣārā*, in *Seize traités*, 15–21, here 15; and Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Les hérésies christologiques d'après Grégoire Bar Hébraeus*, ed. and tr. François Nau, Patrologia Orientalis 13, fasc. 2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), 264.

[69] See, for example, Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ*, 51; al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 306; Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 2:182.

[70] *Pearl*, 24.

[71] *Pearl*, 25.

[72] Nestorius of Constantinople, *Le livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910), 152 (text), idem, *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, tr. G.R. Driver and Leonard Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 98–99 (trans.), though instead of Simon Magus and Menander, Nestorius associates the expression 'Mother of God' with the followers of Mani, whom he accuses of

Thus, ʿAbdīshōʿ polemicizes against Cyril—and by extension, the Miaphysite churches of his day—for failing to adequately distinguish between the divinity and humanity in Christ, asserting that the Church of the East alone has faithfully preserved them:

> We [the Church of then East], however, call the Virgin 'Mother of Christ', the term established by the prophets and apostles, and which signifies the union generally. Cyril, who in the anathemas he wrote, condemns all who distinguish between the divinity and humanity of Christ, [also] condemns the Holy Scriptures. For the apostles and prophets distinguished between the natures (*kyānē*) of the person (*parṣōpā*), and from them the holy Fathers taught that Christ was perfect God and perfect man, the likeness of God and the likeness of the servant, the son of David and the son of the Most High, flesh and Word.[73]

Once introducing the Church of the East's teaching on this vital distinction, ʿAbdīshōʿ begins his account of Ephesus by mentioning the schisms, killings, and banishments (*palgwāṯā w-qeṭlē w-ʾeḵsōryās*) in the aftermath of Ephesus. Here, he makes a passing reference to yet another historical work: a now lost 'ecclesiastical history' (*ʾeqlesasṭīqī*) by Irenaeus of Tyre.[74] Turning his narrative focus to the Council of Chalcedon (451), our author relates that the emperor Marcian (r. 450–457)—whom he describes as 'illustrious' (*naṣṣīḥā*) and 'Christ-loving' (*rāḥem la-mšīḥā*)—convoked a council to enforce the acceptance of Christ's two natures. Yet in opposition to what would eventually become orthodoxy for the Church of the East, the council declared that the union between the divine and human natures occurred in Christ's single *qnōmā*, as opposed to his Person.[75] ʿAbdīshōʿ explains that this was due to a linguistic misunderstanding, since in Greek the terms for person (*parṣōpā*) and *qnōmā* both find expression in the word ὑπόστασις. As such, the Chalcedonians 'declare but one *qnōmā* in Christ'.[76]

maintaining the fictitiousness of Christ's humanity, as does Babai the Great, *Babai Magni Liber de unione*, ed. and tr. Arthur Vaschalde, CSCO 79–80 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1953), 99–100 (text), 69–70 (trans.). ʿAbdīshōʿ's substitution, however, does little to change the comparison, since Simon Magus was often regarded as the father of gnostic, in particular phantasiast, heresies. See Barhebraeus, *Hérésies christologiques*, 252; Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 35–54.

[73] *Pearl*, 25. Allusion to Phil 2:7; see also Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai*, 97–101.

[74] *Pearl*, 25–26. As far as I am aware, there appears to be no extant Syriac version of an 'ecclesiastical history' attributed to Irenaeus of Tyre, a high-ranking Byzantine statesman and partisan of Nestorius during the controversy. Following the Council, Irenaeus was exiled to Petra where he wrote his *Tragoedia*, a first-hand account of Nestorius's trials at Ephesus. The work has come down to us in a Latin abridgement by Rusticus of Rome (fl. sixth century); see Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 168–190. ʿAbdīshōʿ states in his *Catalogue*, 35 (text), 160 (trans.) that Irenaeus 'composed five ecclesiastical histories (*sām ḥammeš ʾeqlesasṭīqī*) concerning the persecution of Mār Nestorius and all that happened in that time'.

[75] *Pearl*, 25. [76] *Pearl*, 25.

By ʿAbdīshōʿ's time, this view had become well established as the Church of the East often regarded the Diophysite Christology of Chalcedon as closer to its own, and was thus far less hostile to it than it was to the Miaphysitism of Cyril and his followers. The catholicos Īshōʿyahb II (r. 628–645), for example, held that despite the good intentions of the council, the 'feeble phraseology' of its Christology led to the doctrine of Christ's single *qnōmā*.[77] More than a century later, Shāhdūst of Ṭirhān (fl. ninth century) drew attention to the confusion arising from the Chalcedonians' understanding of the terms *qnōmā*, stating: '*qnōmā* has been set down here in place of person (*parṣōpā*) and it possible that your error is that you have read *qnōmā* as *ʾīpōsṭāsīs* (*scil.*, ὑπόστασις) and that you call the person *prōṣōpōn* (*scil.* πρόσωπον)'.[78] Similarly, despite these differences, Elias bar Shennāyā readily acknowledged that the Melkites are closer to his own community than the Jacobites (*innakum aqrab ilaynā min ghayrikum*), since the two agree on Christ's two natures (*muttafiqūna fī al-qawl bi-annā al-masīḥ jawharān*)—a principal he sees as crucial (*wa-huwa aṣl kabīr*).[79] However, aside from claiming that the Melkites laboured under a gross linguistic misapprehension, ʿAbdīshōʿ provides no further discussion of the difference between *parṣōpā* and *qnōmā* in his narrative.[80] Instead, he draws his account of Chalcedon to a close by stating that all who failed to accept the emperor's formula were condemned.[81]

The *Pearl*'s potted history of the ecumenical councils ends here. Having outlined the doctrines of Cyril and Nestorius, ʿAbdīshōʿ turns his attention to the emergence of the Jacobite and Melkite churches as distinct ecclesial entities:

> From that time onwards Christianity became divided into three confessions (*tawdyāṯā*). The first profess one nature (*kyānā*) and one *qnōmā* in Christ, to which the Copts (*ʾeggepbṭāyē meṣrāyē*) and Kushites (*kuššāyē*) adhere, according to the tradition of Cyril, their patriarch. They are called 'Jacobites', after Jacob, a Syrian doctor who zealously spread the confession of Cyril among the Syrians and Armenians.
>
> The second claims two natures and one *qnōmā* [in Christ]. They are called 'Melkites', because it was forcibly imposed by the king. Of those who adhere to this this are the Romans called 'Franks' (*rōhmāyē d-meṭqrēn prangāyē*), the Constantinopolitans who are Greeks (*yawnāyē*), and all the northern nations (*ʿammē kolhōn garbāyē*) such as the Rus (*ruššāyē*), the Alans (*ʾālānāyē*), the

[77] Brock, 'The Christology of the Church of the East', 129.

[78] Trans. modified from Luise Abramowski and Alan Goodman (ed. and tr.), *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts: Cambridge University Library MS Oriental 1319*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1:10 (text), 2:9–10 (trans.).

[79] Bar Shennāyā, *al-Burhān*, 169v–170r (text), idem, *Buch vom Beweis der Wahrheit des Glaubens*, 57–58 (trans.).

[80] For more on the distinction between *parṣōpā* and *qnōmā*, see Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai*, 89–91.

[81] *Pearl*, 26.

> Circassians (*šarkas*), the Ossetes (*ʾāsāyē*),[82] the Georgians (*gurgāyē*), and their neighbours. The Franks are set apart from these others because they say that the Holy Spirit proceeds (*nāpeq*) from the Father and the Son,[83] and because they use unleavened bread (*paṭṭīrā*) in the Eucharist. These two [Melkite] confessions accept [the expression] 'Mother of God'. The Jacobites, however, add [the formula] 'who was crucified for us' to the liturgical hymn (*qanōnā*) *Holy God!*[84]

ʿAbdīshōʿ's enumeration of the ethnic divisions of the Jacobites and Melkites is strikingly different from earlier East Syrian descriptions. For example, Elias bar Shennāyā states that the Jacobites are numerous among the Syrians of Byzantium and the East, as well as in Sudan, Egypt, and its environs. However, in contrast to ʿAbdīshōʿ, he provides no ethno-geographical information about the Melkites.[85] Elias ibn al-Muqlī's (d. before 1132) depiction of the three main confessions is even sparser, providing only a basic outline of their Christological doctrines.[86] Given the level of detail of the *Pearl*'s account, it is possible that ʿAbdīshōʿ's knowledge of Christian groups from beyond the Iraqi heartland of the Church of the East arose from ecumenical contacts in the Crusader and Mongol period.[87] An almost identical list of Chalcedonian groupings is provided in a brief treatise on Christological heresies by ʿAbdīshōʿ's older contemporary Barhebraeus. Here, Barhebraeus mentions the Greeks, the Iberians (*ʾīḇārāyē*, i.e., Georgians), Alans, Russians, Syrian (i.e., Syriac-using) Melkites (*malkāyā suryāyē*), Maronites, and Franks. Barhebraeus then adds, as ʿAbdīshōʿ does, that the Franks are distinguished by their claim that that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father.[88] We also know from the travel account of the Franciscan William of

[82] In his English translation of the *Pearl*, Percy Badger (*The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 2:399) leaves *ʾasāyē* untranslated. I have opted for 'Ossetes' because the term was associated with the Alans, known to medieval Arabic, Persian, and Byzantine writers as the *Ās*; see Vasiliĭ Ivanovich Abaev and Harold Walter Bailey, 'Alans', *EIr* 1 (1985): 801–803. In 1253 the Franciscan traveller Willem van Ruysbroeck (William of Rubruck) identifies a people known both as Alans and Aas in the Mongol camp of Sartaq, whom he notes are 'Christians of the Greek rite', i.e., Melkite; Willem van Ruysbroeck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253–1255*, tr. Peter Jackson and Peter Morgan (London: Hackett, 2009), 102.

[83] A reference to the *filioque* (Latin for 'and from the Son'), a formula which had become incorporated into the Latin Creed and was a source of conflict between the Roman and Byzantine Churches.

[84] *Pearl*, 27. ʿAbdīshōʿ refers here to the Miaphysite addition to the *Trisagion* ('Thrice Holy') hymn, which reflects Cyril's 'one subject' Christology, i.e., that God the Word *became* Flesh—as opposed to having *united with the assumed man*—and thus suffered and died on the Cross. See Sebastian P. Brock, 'The Thrice-Holy Hymn in the Liturgy', *Eastern Churches Review* 7, no. 2 (1985): 24–34.

[85] Bar Shennāyā, *al-Burhān*, 160v (text), idem, *Buch vom Beweis der Wahrheit des Glaubens*, 46 (trans.): *fa-hum khalq kathir min al-suryān wa-balad al-rūm wa-diyār al-mashriq wa-ghayrihā wa-jamīʿ ahl al-Sūdān wa-qibṭ al-Miṣr wa-aʿmālihā.*

[86] Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 1:239–245.

[87] Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 89–94.

[88] Barhebraeus, *Les héresies christologiques*, 264. Arabic- and Syriac-speaking Melkites were of course well-known to the Church of the East, having maintained a centuries-long presence in Mesopotamia and Iran during the Abbasid period; see Joseph Nasrallah, *L'Église melchite en Iraq, en Perse et dans l'Asie Centrale* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1976), 40–90.

Rubruck that Slavic and Caucasian Christians could often be found alongside Nestorians in Central Asia at the Great Khan Mönke in 1254.[89] Furthermore, the Church of the East maintained close contacts with the Latin West under Yahbalāhā III, during whose reign theological exchanges between the two took place.[90] While keen to secure the cooperation of its Latin allies, the Church of the East was equally careful not to compromise its dogma when asked by the Papacy to produce credal statements, whether on matters Christological or the *filioque*, as we learn from Rabban Ṣawmā's audience with cardinals of Rome in 1287 and Yahbalāhā's correspondence with Popes Boniface III in 1302 and Benedict XI in 1304.[91] As such, the *Pearl*'s survey of interconfessional differences can be seen as an attempt to inform its readers about the Church of the East's place within a broader commonwealth of churches. Thanks to the existence of the Mongol polity, this commonwealth not only included the Church of the East's regional coreligionists but also extended to the Slavs, Caucasians, and, most notably, Latins.

*

We now return to ʿAbdīshōʿ's outline of the three main confessions. Having accounted for their historical emergence, our author draws up a brief refutation of the Melkite and Jacobite positions on the *communicatio idiomatum*. Citing John bar Penkāyē by name, ʿAbdīshōʿ employs a visual illustration from an unnamed work by the seventh-century writer:[92] 'Christ' (*mšīḥā*) is spelt in large purple letters to signify a 'union of mingling' (*ḥḏāyūṯā d-muzzāḡā*) professed by the Jacobites, which according to the East Syrian view, inevitably confounds the human and divine natures of Christ—a charge Miaphysite writers repeatedly denied.[93] ʿAbdīshōʿ denounces this mode of union as corruption (*ḥubbālā*) and confusion (*bulbālā*) since the ink used to spell 'Christ' is neither red nor black but purple. He then proceeds to write 'Christ' in large black letters with a red outline, each colour symbolizing the two separate natures in a union of

[89] Van Ruysbroeck, *The Mission of Friar William*, 102ff.

[90] See Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 89ff.

[91] Anonymous, *Taʿrīṯā*, 29 (text), idem, *Histoire*, 95–97 (trans.). Yahballāhāʿs correspondence with the papacy is preserved in the Vatican archives and has been edited and translated by Laura Bottini (ed. and tr.), 'Due lettere inedite de patriarca Mar Yahbhallaha III', *Rivista degli studi orientali* 66, no. 3–4 (1992): 239–258. On the Church of the East's cautious theological and diplomatic engagement with the Papacy in this period, see Teule, 'Saint Louis and the East Syrians'; Rassi, 'Between *ʿaṣabiyya* and Ecumenism'.

[92] Although ʿAbdīshōʿ mentions Bar Penkāyē's name, it is unclear to me which of his works he has in mind. Aside from only four out of fifteen chapters of his *Ktāḇ rēš mellē*, Bar Penkāyē's works remain largely unedited. On these, see *GSL*, 210–211.

[93] Despite the belief that Christ's humanity and divinity were united in a single nature, medieval Miaphysite theologians were at pains to point out that this union occurred *without* confusion or alteration of the two natures and their distinctive characteristics. See, for example, Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien*, 212–234; Ibn Jarīr, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid*, 11r–11v; Barhebraeus, *Candélabre: Quatrième Base*, 21–23. See also al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl's notes on Ibn ʿAdī's response to ʿĪsā ibn al-Warrāq (*al-Shukūk min Abī ʿĪsā ibn Warrāq wa-jawāb ʿanhā min Yahyā ibn ʿAdī*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 39, § 41ff).

conjunction (*ḥḏāyūṯā d-naqqīpūṯā*). Thus he declares: 'Behold beauty! Behold light!'[94]

With this demonstration ʿAbdīshōʿ neatly conveys a classical Antiochene contrast. In response to the Apollinarians' view of 'one nature in the Incarnate Christ', Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius rejected a 'mingling' or 'mixture' of natures wherein the humanity and divinity in Christ lost their discernible characteristics and functions. Instead, they employed the term 'conjunction' (συνάφεια) to explain how God's humanity and divinity were inseparably bound in Christ's single person, through which their operational natures and discernible properties were sustained.[95] As Antiochene thinking gradually found its way into the Church of the East in the fifth to seventh centuries, a Syriac lexicon was formalized to express this distinction. Babai the Great, for example, polemicized against two kinds of union: 'intermingling' (*muzzāḡā*) and 'mixing' (*ḥulṭānā*), terms that were later rendered *imtizāj* or *ikhtilāṭ* in Arabic.[96] In opposition to such modes of uniting, Babai employed 'conjunction' (*naqqīpūṯā*, the Syriac for Theodore's συνάφεια), a term which preserved the unique identities of the two natures and safeguarded them against any inference of Theopaschitism.[97] Consequently, East Syrian writers in later centuries would continue to understand the Incarnation as a process of conjunction,[98] a term Arabic Christian scholars would later translate as *ittiṣāl*.[99]

The Christology of Chalcedon is refuted in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Pearl* with equal vigour, though this time without visual metaphor. Here, he asserts that if the divine *qnōmā*—a spirit and uncompounded being (*rūḥā ʾīṯyā lā mrakḇā*)—and the human *qnōmā*—a temporal and compounded body (*gušmā zaḇnānāyā mrakḇā*)—were one, then Christ's discernible attributes would be destroyed, resulting in something neither God nor man.[100] As for the appellation 'Mother of God', ʿAbdīshōʿ offers the following refutation: if Mary were Mother of God, then Christ would not simply be the Son of God, but also Father, Son, and

[94] *Pearl*, 28.

[95] Friedrich Loofs et al. (eds), *Nestoriana: die Fragmente des Nestorius* (Halle: S. Max Niemeyer, 1905), 176; Nestorius, *Bazaar d'Heraclide*, 230 (text), idem, *Bazaar of Heracleides*, 157 (trans.). See also J.F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 90–91; Mcleod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, 54–63; André de Halleux, 'Nestorius: History and Doctrine', in *Syriac Dialogue: First Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 1994), 200–215, here 209.

[96] As we have observed in Section 4.1 regarding Muslim presentations of the various Christian positions on the Incarnation.

[97] For the numerous occasions in which the term *naqqīpūṯā* appears in Babai's *Kṯāḇā da-ḥḏāyūṯā* to describe this mode of the uniting, see Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, 92, no. 11.

[98] Abramowski and Goodman, *Nestorian Christological Texts*, 1:11, 49 (text) 2:10, 11, 31 (trans.) (Shāhdōst of Ṭirhān), 1:74 (text), 2:45 (trans.) (Pseudo-Isaac of Nineveh), 1:153 (text), 2:90 (trans.) (Creed of the Bishops of Persia to Khosroes), 1:183, 186 (text), 2:108, 110 (trans.) (Pseudo-Nestorius).

[99] For example, al-Baṣrī, *al-Masāʾil*, 196; Ibn Mattā's *Kitāb al-majdal*, 73r; Elias bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-majlis*, 59.

[100] *Pearl*, 29.

Holy Spirit. But because Christ was incarnated through the Sonship (*brūṯā*) of the Trinity, Christ must only be the Son—thus making Mary the Mother of Christ.[101] Finally, ʿAbdīshōʿ responds to the charge that the duality of natures and *qnōmē* implies the existence of two sons and thus a quaternity (*rbīʿūṯā*) of Persons.[102] To this he simply states that the Church confesses only one Son before and after the Incarnation, and so no fourth person is added to the Trinity.[103]

Before ending this section, it is worth drawing out a further context to the *Pearl*'s combination of narrative and polemic. As we noted in Chapter 1 of this book, our author states in his preface that Yahbalāhā had instructed him to compose a systematic summary of the faith that would later become the *Pearl*. Although this statement can be read as merely a topos, it is not implausible that the Catholicos demanded such a work be made. In addition to the Church of the East's theological contacts with the Latins, we also know from the synod of Timothy II in 1318, at which ʿAbdīshōʿ himself participated, that the 'strengthening of ecclesiastical doctrine' (*quyyām yulpānē ʿedtānāyē*) in all schools under the Church's care was made a priority.[104] Seen in this light, the didactic function of the *Pearl*'s Christology and its use of historical narrative become clearer. It was through such narratives that the Church defended its Christology while situating itself within a wider matrix of ecclesial communities. As such, it was important for ʿAbdīshōʿ to preserve through the Church's official literature a late antique inheritance of doctrinal divisions.

4.2.2 From *ʿaṣabiyya* to Ecumenism: ʿAbdīshōʿ's Arabic Christology

Having examined the way ʿAbdīshōʿ expresses Christological difference in his Syriac *Pearl*, we now turn our attention to his Arabic Christology. As we observed in the previous section, the *Pearl*'s discussion of Christology takes place within a church-historical framework in which narratives about Ephesus appear alongside discourses on Christ's natures. Now, although the ideas expressed in his Arabic works are in keeping with the same doctrinal traditions, the literary forms underlying them differ in some important regards.

The literary forms in question are rooted in Christian–Muslim discussions about the Incarnation, a feature that is impossible to overlook where ʿAbdīshōʿ's Arabic Christology is concerned. As we observed in Section 4.1, Muslim and

[101] *Pearl*, 29–30.

[102] Cf. Abramowski and Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, 1:196 (text), 2:116–117 (trans.) (Pseudo-Nestorius).

[103] *Pearl*, 30–31.

[104] See Canon II of the acts of this synod in Mai, *Scriptorum* veterum, 10:98–99 (trans.), 262–263 (text).

Jewish theologians often took note of the historical divisions among Christians, enumerating and outlining these positions before refuting them all as equally objectionable. This strategy is paralleled in Christian Arabic theological writing from the early Abbasid period onwards. Typically, Christian writers outlined the three main positions before championing their own and refuting the remaining two. As Mark Beaumont has pointed out, this method was intended to inculcate key aspects of Christological doctrine to an internal audience while presenting 'an apology designed to commend the doctrine of the Incarnation to a Muslim interlocutor'.[105] A central feature of this didacticism is the use of analogy and metaphor to explain the various modes of the union between the human and divine in Christ. To better understand ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of this method, it is necessary to provide an overview of its earlier development.

The earliest iteration of this analogical approach comes from the writings of the Church Fathers, many of whom looked to Aristotelian and Stoic understandings of mixture, composition, and union, in order to adequately describe the coming together of Christ's natures.[106] A systematic treatment of these analogies in Syriac occurs in Theodore bar Kōnī's *Scholion*, a late eighth-century *summa* in question-and-answer form, the tenth *mēmrā* of which has received attention from Sydney Griffith concerning its anti-Muslim apologetic agenda.[107] Of greater interest to us for the moment is Question 54 of the sixth *mēmrā*. Here, Bar Kōnī provides the following definition of union and its types, each of which he elucidates with a specific analogy:

> Uniting is the bonding (*ḥzāqa*) and confining (*ʾassīrūṯā*) of separate things that are united as one thing and is the result of either two or more things. Its types are seven:
>
> i. Natural (*kyānāyā*) and qnōmic (*qnōmāyā*), like the soul and the body that become one in nature and *qnōmā* through uniting and the elements that unite and constitute the body of humans and animals;
> ii. Voluntary union (*ḥḏāyūṯā ṣeḇyānāytā*), like a gathering of believers being one spirit and one mind (Acts 4:32);

[105] Beaumont, "Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation', 58.

[106] Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers, Vol. 1, Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 372–386; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 151, 297–298, 303, 312, 321.

[107] Sydney H. Griffith, 'Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Kônî's Apology for Christianity', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981): 158–188; idem, 'Theodore bar Kônî's Scholion: A Nestorian Summa contra Gentiles from the First Abbasid Century', in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period. Dumbarton Oaks Symposium, 1980*, ed. Nina G. Garsoïan et al. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 53–72; idem, 'Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)', in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 251–273, here 261–262.

iii. Conjunction (*naqqīpūṯā*), like the man who will leave his father and mother to join his wife to become one in flesh (Gen 2:24, cf. Mat 19:6);
iv. Personal (*parṣōpāytā*), like the messenger who assumes (*lḇeš*) the person of the king;
v. Composition (*rukkāḇā*), like gold and silver that are composed (*meṯrakḇīn*), and constitute a [single] chest (*qēʾḇōṯā*);
vi. Mixture (*ḥulṭānā*), like medicines that are mixed;
vii. Mingling (*muzzāḡā*), like water mixed with wine, or warm things with cold.[108]

In the late antique and early medieval Syriac milieu, such analogies became the site of much intra-Christian controversy. As previously noted, the unions of mingling and mixture were most commonly ascribed to the Jacobites, often with the aim of demonstrating how they confused the identities of the human and divine natures. We have also mentioned the Nestorian preference for union by conjunction (*naqqīpūṯā*), which, East Syrian theologians argued, safeguarded the distinct identity of each of the two inseparably bound natures in Christ's person. It is therefore unsurprising to find that the unions of conjunction and will (nos ii and iii in the above passage) are explained by Bar Kōnī with scriptural typologies—in contrast to the remaining five—and personal union (no. iv above) is dignified with a kingly analogy. An argument against mixture as a mode of Incarnation comes from Babai the Great's *Kṯāḇā da-ḥḏāyūṯā* ('Book of the Union'), 'a fundamental statement of the Christology of the Church to this day'.[109] Here, his opposition to the Miaphysites led him to compare their conception of union to various kinds of imperfect mixtures, for instance, a liquid or humid that loses its faculty and taste and acquires a *tertium quid* (*ḥaylā [ʾ]ḥrēnā w-ṭaʿmā [ʾ]ḥrēnā qanyā*).[110] Babai further contends that a uniting of natures characterized by composition (no. v in the above passage), like that of a house and its parts, implies that both natures are limited by one another and by that which composes them—and thus the union does not occur voluntarily (*law d-ṣeḇyānā [h]y ḥḏāyūṯā*). However, according to Babai, 'God the Word, Who is unlimited as Father and Holy Spirit, dwells in his humanity voluntarily.'[111] Similarly, in chapters attributed to Nestorius in a late collection of Christological texts, the author describes composition as the joining of two things devoid of mutually participative wills, just as wool is woven with flax to create a coat. This mode of union is contrasted with 'the conjunction (*naqqīpūṯā*) of the perfect natures that are known in the one Person (*parṣōpā*), [which] participate (*mšawtpīn*) in the worship, honour, and greatness of the one

[108] Bar Kōnī, *Liber scholiorum (Seert)*, 2:34–35 (text); idem, *Scholies (Séert)*, 2:23–24 (trans.).
[109] Sebastian P. Brock, 'Babai the Great', in *GEDSH*, 49–50.
[110] Babai, *Liber de unione*, 74 (text), 60 (trans.). See also Chediath, *The Christology of Babai the Great*, 94, n. 8.
[111] Babai, *Liber de unione*, 233 (text), 189–190 (trans.).

Person'.[112] As for the union of person (no. iv in the above passage), this expresses not only a unity of person but also a union through which the identity of the Son is 'assumed' or 'put on' (*lḇeš*) by the Father. To this end, East Syrian authors typically expressed this mode of incarnation through clothing (*lḇūšyā*) and temple (*hayklā*) metaphors,[113] an inheritance from Theodore of Mopsuestia, who described Christ's body as a garment wrapped around the divinity (cf. Ps 45:8) and a temple in which the Godhead dwells (cf. Jn 2:19).[114]

The mutual participation of the two natures is brought to the fore in two further categories of union central to Nestorian Christology: the union of good pleasure and will. Theodore of Mopsuestia taught that both Christ and the saints were indwelled by God's divinity, yet Christ's indwelling differed in one crucial regard: it was an indwelling of 'good pleasure (ευδοξία) as His true Son', whereby 'He has united Himself in every honour'.[115] The implication here is that Christ's humanity did not receive the Word passively as did the saints and prophets but through the shared will of two distinct yet bound natures.[116] Yet it is important to remember that Nestorian writers did not maintain that Christ possessed a single will.[117] What was meant by a union of will was that the human and divine natures possessed separate wills that functioned in perfect accord with one another. This mutuality is neatly explained by 'Amr ibn Mattā in his *Kitāb al-majdal*. Here, he states that 'the purpose (*murād*) of these two combined, inseparable natures is one by the agreement of the two wills (*bi-ttifāq al-iradatayn*)'.[118] He elaborates:

> It is said that the volition (*mashī'a*) of God the Word and that of the man in which He appeared is one on account of the uniting of the pre-existent [Word] (*qadīm*) with the temporally generated being (*muḥdath*). It is *not* [said] that God and man are [literally] one will. Rather, it is known from this temporally generated being that its volition is consentaneous (*muwāfiqa*) with that of the pre-existent [Word]. For this reason, the volition is one. When the action of the divinity is not identical to that of the humanity, it does not follow that the two are consentaneous. Nor when the volition of the pre-existent [Word] and that of the temporally generated being are one does it follow that the two are identical. Rather, the two agree in purpose (*yattafiqān bi-l-murād*). Thus, the volition is

[112] Abramowski and Goodman, *A Collection of Nestorian Christological Texts*, 181–182 (text), 108 (trans.).

[113] Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai*, 91–92 and Sebastian P. Brock, 'Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in the Syriac Tradition', in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter, internationales Kolloquium, Eichstätt*, ed. Margot Schmidt (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), 11–40.

[114] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 305.

[115] Mcleod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, 38.

[116] Frederick G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 180.

[117] The doctrine of one will in Christ was known as monotheletism, which does not concern us here; see Jack Tannous, 'In Search of Monotheletism', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014): 29–67.

[118] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 75v.

> one because whoever is capable of uniting with Him possesses a volition that is generated at the time of union (*lahu al-mashīʾa al-kāʾina maʿa al-ittiḥād*)—[a volition] that is absolutely consentaneous with that of the pre-existent [Word].[119]

One finds a similar understanding of a consentaneous union in Barhebraeus' *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries* a work in which he occasionally uses East Syrian as well as West Syrian sources. In his chapter on the Incarnation, Barhebraeus explains that the union of will (*ḥḏāyūṯā d-ṣeḇyānā*) in Christ occurred only metaphorically (*'aššīltā ba-šmā balḥōḏ*), through a duality (*trayānūṯa*) of mutual wills. To this end he cites a liturgical hymn by Narsai, 'Doctor of the Nestorians', stating that it is permissible to speak of the two as one, so long as their distinctions (*puršānayhōn*) are not forgotten.'[120]

This idea of a privileged and mutual indwelling emerged in Christological discussions between East Syrian apologists and Muslims. But to fully understand its background, we must once again look to the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. In his *On the Incarnation*, Theodore holds the term 'indwelling' to be equivocal, much as the designations 'man' and 'wolf' fall under the universal genus of 'animal' but differ in specificity.[121] He further states:

> [I]f something is general in its nomenclature, it does not damage its specificity; but contrariwise [particular things] are very remote from one another in nature and in rank. This is why we are to distinguish them correspondingly to how God and his creation admit of distinction. For there is no greater distinction than this. In the common principle [things] are together, but from the specific features we learn [their] precise glory. Thus also here: the word 'indwelling' is general; but the manner of indwelling applies to each [specifically]. Nor does equivocity (*šawyūṯeh da-šmā*)[122] of 'indwelling' mean equivalence of manner but [the term] is even used in opposite [senses] in logical investigations.[123]

[119] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 80v.

[120] Barhebraeus, *Candélabre: Quatrième Base*, 148–151. Cf. Narsai, *Narsai doctoris syri: Homilae et carmina*, ed. Alphonse Mingana (Mosul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905), 10–11. In his spiritual works, Barhebraeus also sought inspiration from Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyāthā, two East Syrian writers who from the twelfth century had been incorporated into West Syrian monastic compilations. See Herman G.B. Teule, 'Christian Spiritual Sources in Barhebraeus' *Ethicon* and *The Book of the Dove*', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60, no. 1–4 (2008): 333–354, here 342–343, 343–344.

[121] John Behr (ed. and tr.), *The Case against Diodore and Theodore* (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 442 (text), 443 (trans.). I cite here a fragment from a Syriac translation, since this was the version known to later East Syrian writers.

[122] The underlying Greek term is ὁμώνυμα (lit. 'homonym') from Aristotle's *Categories* 1a1, pertaining to things that 'have the name in common but which have a different definition of substance'. Daniel King (ed. and tr.), *The Earliest Syriac Translation of Aristotle's Categories: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 96 (text), 97 (trans.), and 325 (Syriac-Greek glossary).

[123] Behr, *The Case against Diodore and Theodore*, 444 (text), 445 (trans.). My translation is slightly amended from Behr's.

Based on this distinction between universal and specific, Theodore circumscribes different modes of indwelling to the saints and Christ. As we have already observed, he ascribes to Christ an indwelling of good pleasure, which is to say that from the moment of Jesus's conception, the eternal Word was inseparably bound to his humanity. This honour was not granted to the prophets, who only received their indwelling when the Holy Spirit was revealed to them.[124] East Syrian authors would later adopt this understanding of the union in order to delineate the Church of the East's position. In the seventh century, Babai the Great argued that one must not understand equality of name as equality of action (*law šawyūṯ šummāhā šawyūṯ suʿrānā zāḏēq l-mestakkālū*). For although humans other than Christ might be considered temples in which God dwells, only in Christ was His indwelling a temple in the manner of union (*mḥaydāʾīṯ*), wherein the humanity and divinity became a single and eternal object of worship.[125]

This critical distinction later occurs in Christian–Muslim discussions about Christ's divinity. In Elias bar Shennāyā's dialogue with the Marwānid vizier al-Maghribī in 1027, the latter wishes to know how Christians reconcile God's transcendence with their belief in divine indwelling. Bar Shennāyā responds that God is not confined to the nature or essence of a single created being, since He can neither be limited, divided, nor apportioned in one place (*lā yanḥaṣiru . . . wa-lā yatajazzaʾu wa-lā yatabaʿaḍu*) at the exclusion of another (*fī makān dūna makān*). Rather, He is present in all places equally (*bi-l-sawiyya*).[126] When pressed by al-Maghribī to explain how God's indwelling of Christ differs from that of the Prophets, Bar Shennāyā, like Theodore of Mopsuestia, explains that 'indwelling' is an equivocal term (*min al-asmāʾ al-mushtaraka*). Accordingly, 'indwelling' applies to both Christ and the prophets; yet, only in Christ was the Indwelling one of inseparable union (*ittiḥād alladhī lā yalḥaqahu iftirāq*) and was thus a complete indwelling (*ḥulūl al-kamāl*). For only in Christ was God's indwelling and union one of 'honour (*waqār*), good pleasure (*riḍāʾ*), and volition (*mashīʾa*)'.[127] This distinction was deemed vital enough for Elias II ibn al-Muqlī (d. 1131) to dedicate a whole chapter to in his *Uṣūl al-dīn*, where he argues—in words suggesting reliance on Bar Shennāyā—for Christ's perfect union (*ittiḥād al-kamāl*), 'because the union of the Saviour is a union of indwelling without separation—an indwelling of good pleasure, honour, and volition'.[128] Ibn al-Muqlī further states that God's indwelling of man is not bodily because He is

[124] Behr, *The Case against Diodore and Theodore*, 282 (text), 283 (trans.). See also summary of Theodore's position by Mcleod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity*, 180: 'The Word's indwelling within Christ's human nature is therefore a special graced honor exceeding that shown to the saints, because his human nature is inseparably united with the Word's nature.'

[125] Babai, *Liber de unione*, 237–238 (text), 192–193 (trans.).

[126] Bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-majālis*, 38–39.

[127] Bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-majālis*, 30–32.

[128] Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 2:249.

not limited to one place at the expense of another, nor can a part of Him be divided and apportioned.[129] In this way, therefore, the Church of the East affirmed Christ's perfect humanity and divinity by making a clear distinction between two phenomena that share a name but differ in meaning: (i) the indwelling of the prophets, which was partial, entirely acted upon by God, and passively received; and (ii) the indwelling of the *homo assumptus*, which was complete, mutual, and inseparable.

Various modes of uniting and their corresponding analogies were also placed in the service of anti-Muslim apologetics, as occurs once again in Bar Shennāyā's disputation with al-Maghribī.[130] When the Muslim vizier wishes to know what other Christians believe concerning the Incarnation, Elias responds that the Jacobites are obliged to confess a natural union (*ittiḥād ṭabīʿī*), like the body and the soul, or the mingling (*mumāzaja*) and mixture (*ikhtilāṭ*) of substances, while the Melkites confess a union of composition (*ittiḥād al-tarkīb*) like the combination (*taʾlīf*) of a door or chair. On that account, Bar Shennāyā claims that the Jacobites and Melkites fail to grasp Christ's complete indwelling.[131] When asked about the Nestorian position, Bar Shennāyā responds that his community confesses a union of (i) volition (*mashīʾa*), as expressed in the statement 'all who believed were one in spirit and mind' (Acts 4:32); (ii) conjunction (*ittiṣāl*), invoking the Old Testament typology of a man leaving his parents to become one with his wife; and (iii) and a personal union (*ittiḥād wajhī*), like the king and his deputy in command (*amr*), prohibition (*nahy*), and leadership (*tadbīr*).[132] It is only these modes of uniting, Bar Shennāyā avers, that preserve the distinct operations and identities of the two natures, namely the transcendence of the divine and the createdness of the human. To this effect, he employs the examples: 'just as Zayd and ʿAmr are one in will, a man and a woman are one in flesh, and the king and his minister are one in command'.[133] Having driven this point home to al-Maghribī, the vizier expresses satisfaction with Bar Shennāyā's exposition of Christology, declaring that the monotheism of the Nestorians has been proven (*wa-l-ān fa-qad ṣaḥḥa tawḥīdukum*).[134]

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[129] Compare Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 2:252 with Bar Shennāyā, *Kitāb al-majālis*, 38–39.

[130] Apart from Bar Kōnī, I have been unable to find the same sequence of analogies in any other apologetic and systematic work of East Syrian provenance prior to the eleventh century. See descriptions of the various types of union in Timothy, *Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdī*, §§ 3.1–3.7; idem, *al-Muḥāwara al-dīniyya*, §§ 21–37; al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 56–79; idem, *al-Masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba*, 178–265; Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 75r–75v; Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 1:239–245.

[131] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 58–59.

[132] I translate *wajh* as 'person' in line with the Syriac understanding of the Greek πρόσωπον (Syr. *parṣōpā*) as 'person'—as opposed to the more literal 'face', 'aspect', or 'direction'. One finds support for my interpretation in Anonymous, *Sharḥ amānat ābāʾ Nīqiyā*, 2:49, which reads: *al-ittiḥād al-shakhṣiyya alladhī huwa al-wajhiyya* [. . .]. See also my discussion of hypostases in Chapter 3.

[133] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 60–61.

[134] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 6.

It is against this background of Theodoran-Antiochene thought and anti-Muslim apologetics that we must approach ʿAbdīshōʿ's Arabic Christology. We begin with his earliest known theological work in Arabic, his *Profession*. The text opens with a brief Trinitarian statement. Immediately afterwards, ʿAbdīshōʿ asserts that the eternal Word is tantamount to (*ʿibāraʿan*) the Wise (*ḥakīm*) and the Son. As such, the Incarnation occurred through the Sonship, 'one of the three hypostases (*aqānīm*)'.[135] In making this statement, ʿAbdīshōʿ frames his discussion of Christology within the Trinitarian language of Christian Arabic apologetics, which had long striven to reconcile the doctrine of God's threeness with His oneness. Setting out from this premise, he states that the Word indwelled and united with the *homo assumptus* (*al-insān al-maʾkhūdh*), and on that account the word 'Christ' encompasses two concepts: perfect man and perfect god in one perfect lord.[136] It then falls upon ʿAbdīshōʿ to define the way in which this union occurred. Employing categories that should now be familiar to us from Bar Kōnī's *Scholion* and Bar Shennāyā's *Majālis*, our author lists six definitions of union:

i. Union by mingling (*imtizāj*) like that of water and wine in a concoction (*mizāj*), or vinegar and honey in oxymel (*sakanjabīn*);
ii. Union by contiguity (*mujāwara*), as in the combination (*taʾlīf*) of iron and wood in a door or a bed (*sarīr*);
iii. Union by will (*irāda*) and volition (*mashīʾa*), in the sense of Acts 4:32: 'All who believed were one in spirit and mind';
iv. Union by personality (*wajhiyya*), in the way that a king and his minister are one in command (*amr*) and injunction (*nahy*);
v. Union by conjunction (*ittiṣāl*), in accordance with Gen. 2:24 and Mat. 19:6: 'A man should leave his father and mother to be joined with his wife, and they will become one flesh';
vi. Union of honour (*waqār*) and dignity (*karāma*), in the sense of the union of God's Word (*kalām*) and Scripture (*muṣḥaf*).[137]

Each of these modes of uniting is then ascribed to the three classical Christological opinions: the Jacobites maintain a union of mingling and mixture by which the human and divine natures became one *qunūm* and nature (*jawhar*), while the Melkites endorse a union of contiguity and composition, in which Christ is two in nature but one *qunūm*. As for his own Christology, ʿAbdīshōʿ explains that:

[135] *Profession*, § 12. [136] *Profession*, § 12. [137] *Profession*, §§ 17–23.

> The Nestorians[138] believe that the union occurred through the messiahship (*masḥa*), the Sonship [of the Trinity], the authority, and the power—a union of will (*irāda*) and volition (*mashīʾa*), good pleasure (*riḍā*), honour (*waqār*), and personality (*wajhiyya*)—in such a manner that the eternal Word and the *homo assumptus* (*al-insān al-maʾkhūdh*) from Mary—two natures: eternal and temporal; divine and human—became one son and one Christ in good will, dignity (*karāma*), volition, will, honour, and person.[139]

Having established the three main definitions of the Incarnation, ʿAbdīshōʿ briefly deconstructs the Christologies of the Jacobites and Melkites. The Jacobites' singularity of natures and *qunūms*, he reasons, results in a Christ without humanity, which voids Christ's biblically attested human nature (*baṭalat al-dālla fī al-injīl ʿalā wujūdihi*).[140] Alternatively, the duality of natures is voided (*baṭalat al-ithnayniyya*), resulting in a *tertium quid* that is neither human nor divine (*fa-huwa idhan shayʾ thālith lā ilāh wa-lā insān*).[141] The Melkites, who, like the Nestorians, also profess two natures in Christ, face a similar problem posed by the single *qunūm*: if this *qunūm* were divine, then the human nature would be destroyed (*iḍmaḥalla*) and vice versa. Here, ʿAbdīshōʿ invokes an Aristotelian understanding of *qunūm* (discussed in Chapter 3) as 'the primary substance that indicates the true nature of the existence of the general (i.e., universal)'.[142] In other words, if what gives individual fixity to the existence of the two natures is indistinguishable, then the operational functions of each cannot be meaningfully defined.[143] On account of these errors, ʿAbdīshōʿ unequivocally denounces the Jacobite and Melkite positions as unbelief (*kufr*) and error (*ḍalāl*).[144]

Turning our attention now to the *Durra*, a work with a more explicit apologetic agenda, we encounter a remarkable shift in the way ʿAbdīshōʿ expresses intra-confessional difference. As in his *Profession*, he begins with a general definition of uniting as either (i) mingling and mixture, like oxymel from honey and vinegar, or medicine (*taryāq*) from its simples (*mufradāt*); (ii) contiguity and combination,

[138] *al-Mashāriqa* ('the Easterners') appears in Gianazza's edition (based on a nineteenth-century witness, Birmingham, Mingana Syr. 112, 149v). However, the term initially employed by the scribe seems to have been crossed out and 'corrected' by later different hand. An earlier witness to the text, Cambridge, University Library Syr. Add. 3087 (seventeenth century) has *al-madhhab al-nasṭūrī* in the first instance (85v) and *madhhab al-nasṭūr* in the second (89v). Similarly, another witness, Harvard, Houghton Library Syr. 52, gives us *madhhab al-nasṭūriyya* (72v) followed by *madhhab al-nasṭūr* (74r). Evidence from these additional manuscripts, therefore, make it likely that 'Nestorian' was the term that ʿAbdīshōʿ originally employed, despite the misapprehension that many premodern and modern East Syrian writers had towards it; see Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: A Lamentable Misnomer'; Seleznyov, 'Nestorius of Constantinople'.

[139] *Profession*, §§ 31–36. [140] *Profession*, §§ 37–39. [141] *Profession*, §§ 40–41.

[142] *Profession*, §§ 47–48.

[143] On this understanding of *qnōmā*/*qunūm* as a primary substance that gives the secondary substance (i.e., nature) its individual reality, see discussion about hypostases in the previous chapter Section 3.3.2. For the Christological context more specifically, see Babai, *Liber de Unione*, 159ff (text), 129ff (trans.); Abramowski and Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, 1:179–180 (text), 2:106–108 (trans.) (Pseudo-Nestorius).

[144] *Profession*, § 43, 51.

like iron and wood in a door, or plaster and brick (*jiṣṣ wa-qirmīd*) in a house; (iii) conjunction, in accordance with Gen 2:24 and Mat 19:6; (iv) personality, like the king and his deputy in command, prohibition and governance; (v) and will and volition, as in Acts 4:32.[145] For ʿAbdīshōʿ, these categories encapsulate 'the quiddity of uniting in general' (*māhiyyat al-ittiḥād ʿalā al-ʿumūm*). As for its specific meaning (*ʿalā l-khuṣūṣ*), it is on this issue that Christians are divided.[146] Before going into these divisions, however, it is worth noting that ʿAbdīshōʿ's distinction between general and specific definitions of uniting closely follows the phraseology of the *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid* of Ibn Jarīr, a Jacobite *summa* composed some two centuries earlier, though it does not contain the same analogies.[147] Whether this constitutes a direct textual reliance or simply a formulaic method of exposition is unclear to me. What is clear, however, is that underlying ʿAbdīshōʿ's exposition is a centuries-long tradition of Arabic- as well as Syriac-language theology—something we have already observed at several turns throughout the previous chapter.

Returning now to his *Durra*, ʿAbdīshōʿ assigns each of the above modes of uniting to the three classical Christological positions: the Jacobites profess mingling and mixture, the Melkites contiguity and fabrication, and our author's own community (whom he once again refers to as 'Nestorian') hold to a union of conjunction, personality, will, and volition. Yet, it is here that a major point of departure from the *Profession* emerges. Instead of refuting each of the two rival confessions, ʿAbdīshōʿ makes a striking call to Christian unity:

> For the sake of this book's preciousness and great value, along with the nobility of its intentions despite its brevity, we will not address which of these doctrines are false and which are correct, lest [this book] becomes partial to one doctrine at the expense of another and benefits from one argument against another. For all [Christians] are agreed on its principles (*muttafiqūn fī uṣūlihi*) and the soundness of what has been brought forth in its chapters. When the fair-minded person rejects the pursuit of capriciousness and partisanship (*aṣabiyya*)[148] and balances arguments with intelligence and reflection, they will find that the difference between them is one of expressions and terms (*al-ʿibārāt wa-l-asāmī*), not the truth itself (*nafs al-ḥaqīqa*) and meanings. For the truth among [Christians] is one, despite the differing words and obstinacy (*muʿānada*) regarding them.[149]

[145] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 114–122. [146] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 123–124.

[147] Ibn Jarīr, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid*, 10v–11r; *Durra*, ch. 5, § 124.

[148] The term *ʿaṣabiyya* would later take on a sociological dimension in the famous *Muqaddima* ('Prolegomena') of the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* of the historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). For Ibn Khaldūn, the term signified the *esprit de corps* of nomadic groups that enabled them to establish dynastic rule over a sedentary population, in a cyclical process of state formation and decline. Prior to this formulation, *ʿaṣabiyya* more commonly carried a negative connotation of disunity and factionalism. See Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 164–182.

[149] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 130–136.

ʿAbdīshōʿ's rejection of capriciousness and partisanship is hardly surprising in light of earlier writers who couched their ecumenism in strikingly similar terms. Ibn Yumn, a scholar in the circle of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), asserted that the ʿ*ulamāʾ* of the three main confessions 'do not differ in the general sense (*maʿnā*) of the union, even if they differ in expression (*ʿibāra*)', attributing the cause of these differences to 'competition and love of power' (*ṭalban li-l-ghulba wa-ḥubb al-riʾāsa*).[150] Another Christian author named ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Arfādī (fl. eleventh-twelfth centuries) wrote that, after witnessing disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) among Christians, he endeavoured to examine the matter without capriciousness (*hawā*) and partisanship (*ʿaṣabiyya*), and 'found there to be no difference between them'.[151] Similarly, Abū Naṣr Yaḥyā Ibn Jarīr (d. 1104) states that he found all Christians to profess a single doctrine (*bi-madhhab wāḥid*) and that their differences were simply a matter of words, not meaning (*ikhtilāfuhum lafẓī lā maʿnawī*).[152] For his part, Ibn al-Ṭayyib refrains from explicitly condemning the Christologies of the Jacobites and Melkites in a brief Christological treatise, allowing that all Christians agree that the Incarnation involved two natures and two *qunūms*, the main difference between them being the description (*waṣf*) of the resulting combination (*mujtamaʿ*) of natures and *qunūms* after their coming together.[153] The eighth chapter of the *Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn* of al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, an older contemporary of ʿAbdīshōʿ, integrates the above-mentioned treatises of Ibn Yumn, al-Arfādī, and Ibn Ṭayyib in his compendium, perhaps hinting at his own ecumenical frame of mind.[154] A better known eschewal of partisanship comes from the *Ktāḇā d-yawnā* ('Book of the Dove') of Barhebraeus. Here, the maphrian tells us that he forsook disputation (*drāšē wa-hpāḵāṭā d-mellē*) after realizing that quarrels over the natures and persons of Christ were but a matter of words and labels (*mellē w-ḵunnāyē*).[155]

Given ʿAbdīshōʿ's polemical stance against rival Christologies in the *Pearl* and *Profession*, his more irenic attitude in the *Durra* is all the more remarkable. This did not mean, however, that he no longer valued his own community's Christological lore. For elsewhere in the *Durra*, he utilizes the same Antiochene–Theodoran formulae encountered in the *Profession*, declaring that 'God fashioned the *homo assumptus* (*al-basharī al-maʾkhūdh*) from the Holy Spirit inside the womb of the pure Virgin, and the eternal Word came to dwell

[150] Abū ʿAlī Nāẓif ibn Yumn, *Faṣl min jumlat maqāla fī al-ittiḥād dhakara fīhi anna ʿulamāʾ al-naṣāra ghayr mukhtalifīn fī maʿnā al-ittiḥād wa-in ikhtalafat ʿibārātuhum*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 8, §§ 93–101, here 93.

[151] ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Arfādī, *Liber de concordia Fidei inter Syros, qui Nestoriani, Melchitæ, et Jacobitæ appellantur*, ed. Nikolai Seleznyov (Moscow: Grifon, 2018), 45–46.

[152] Ibn Jarīr, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-murshid*, 11r.

[153] Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Taʿdīd arāʾ al-naṣārā fī al-ittiḥād wa-ḥujajuhum*, ch. 8, §§ 127–178, here 178.

[154] On these three authors, see *Majmūʿ*, ch. 8, §§ 93–101; 103–125; 127–255.

[155] Barhebraeus, *Ethicon*, 577–578 (text), idem, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove, Together with Some Chapters from the Ethicon*, translated by A.J. Wensinck (Leiden: Brill, 1919), 60 (trans.).

in it (*ḥallat fīhi*), uniting with it in a union of will (*irāda*), person (*wajhiyya*), power (*qudra*), good pleasure (*riḍā*), and volition (*mashīʾa*).'[156] It is possible that by the time ʿAbdīshōʿ wrote his *Durra* in 1302/3, he, like Barhebraeus, had come to see that the age-old rivalries over Christology were simply a matter of words. Yet given the explicit apologetic agenda of the *Durra*, it is equally probable that he no longer deemed it necessary to dwell on inter-confessional differences to defend the reasonableness of the faith against non-Christians.

4.2.3 Mirror Christology and Sufi Poetics

Nor does ʿAbdīshōʿ explicitly attack other Christians in his *Farāʾid*. Instead, when explaining what the Nestorians mean by uniting, he seizes on Arabic poetic models to supply new meaning to long-established Christological concepts. As in his *Profession* and *Durra*, he provides a general definition of uniting through almost identical analogies: (i) mingling and mixing, like wine and water, or honey and vinegar in syrup; (ii) contiguity and fabrication, like wood and iron in the construction of a door or a couch; (iii) conjunction, as in Gen 2:24 and Mat 19:6; (iv) will and volition, as occurs in Acts 4:32; (v) personality, like the union of king and minister; and (vi) dignity and honour, like the union of God's Word and Scripture.[157] In a rather unanticipated turn, however, ʿAbdīshōʿ adds a seventh:

> The union of illumination (*ishrāq*) and effect (*taʾthīr*), as in the uniting of light and translucent jewels (*al-jawāhir al-ṣāfiya*), like their saying about the translucency of glass and wine: 'It was as if it were wine, not a drinking glass, and a drinking glass, not wine' (*fa-ka-annahu khamr wa-lā qadaḥ, wa-ka-annahu qadaḥ wa-lā khamr*).[158]

Before identifying the above 'saying', it is worth outlining the history of this theory of uniting. By ʿAbdīshōʿ's time, such analogies involving the illumination of reflective substances had long featured in Syriac Christological contexts. For Babai the Great, the analogy served to illustrate a strict diophysite understanding of the Incarnation: since God is an infinite being, His divine nature is not limited by His dwelling in and uniting with the *homo assumptus* from Mary. As such, the manner of the union was like that of the sun in a mirror or pure pearl (*ʾa[y]ḵ b-maḥzīṯā wa-ḇ-margānīṯā zhīṯā*).[159] The analogy of the polished mirror is also common in Syriac ascetical contexts. As Sebastian Brock has shown, Dādīshōʿ of Qatar, Simon Ṭaybūtheh, and John of Dalyāthā all spoke of the image of the divine

[156] *Durra*, ch. 5, § 129. [157] *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, §§ 3–8.
[158] *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, § 9. The saying about glass and wine will be identified and discussed below, in this section.
[159] Babai, *Liber de unione*, 234 (text); 190 (trans.)

being reflected in a 'mirror' located deep within the soul.[160] According to John of Dalyāthā, the mystic's intellect (*hawnā*) functions in this way, making God's invisible essence accessible to him.[161] We also find in John a notion of uniting whereby the gnostic is so entirely unified with God (*mḥayyaḏ kolleh b-ḵolleh*) that he is able to freely converse (*b-pare[h]sīya*, from the Greek παῤῥησία) with Him as a son to a father.[162] However, John's mystical theory of unification would fail to gain acceptance within the Church of the East. Accused of the heresy that Christ was able to perceive his divinity, John of Dalyāthā—along with two other mystics, Joseph Ḥazzāyā and John the Solitary—was anathematized at a synod convened by Timothy I in 786/7.[163] In his *majālis* with al-Maghribī, Elias bar Shennāyā is keen to draw attention to this episode of his Church's history in order to demonstrate his commitment to the belief that Christ's union with the eternal Word was characterized by a strict separation of natures—a separation that rival confessions such as the Jacobites allegedly failed to maintain.[164]

Later East Syrian writers would utilize a similar language of ecstatic union to describe the *communicatio idiomatum*. However, whereas John of Dalyāthā circumscribed this mode of union to spiritual adepts, later East Syrian thinkers were careful to restrict it to the uniting of Christ's natures as two distinct yet inseparably bound realities. The catholicos Elias II ibn al-Muqlī, for instance, affirms his Church's anti-Theopaschitism by likening the Incarnation to 'the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of the sun's light and the translucency of a clear pearl (*ṣafāʾ al-luʾluʾ al-naqiyya*); for if it cracks or breaks, the light is undamaged by its breaking'.[165] This precise metaphor—which signifies how the agent of change (the divine nature) is unaffected by the subject of change (the human nature)—features in

[160] Sebastian P. Brock, 'The Imagery of the Spiritual Mirror in Syriac Literature', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 5 (2005): 3–17, here 10–15, quoting Dādīshoʿ of Qaṭar, *Commentaire du Livre d'Abba Isaie (Logoi I-XV) par Dadisho Qatraya (VIIe s.)*, ed. and tr. René Draguet, CSCO 144–145 (Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1972), §§ 7:14; Simon of Ṭaybūtheh, *Works of Simon Taibutheh*, in Alphonse Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics*, Woodbrooke Studies 7 (Cambridge: Heffer, 1934), 60–66 (text), 298, 314–315 (trans.); Isaac of Nineveh, *The Ascetical Homilies of Isaac of Nineveh*, tr. D. Miller (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 403, 405, 414–415, 420, 422; John of Dalyātha, *La collection des lettres de Jean de Dalyatha*, ed. and tr. Robert Beulay, Patrologia Orientalis 39, fasc. 3, Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), Letters 14, 15:1 (text), 2:82 (trans.).

[161] John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, ed. and tr. Mary Hansbury (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), Letter 7, § 3, Letter 14, § 2, Letter 50, § 19, discussed in Treiger, 'al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology"', 709–710.

[162] John of Dalyātha, *Kṯāḇā d-sāḇā*, Mēmrā 19 in Brian Edric Colless, 'The Mysticism of John Saba', 3 vols. (PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, 1969), 1:70–71 (text), 2:201–202 (trans.). See also a similar statement in John of Dalyāthā, *The Letters*, Letter 12, § 5: 'They (*scil.*, the saints) have gained power in the world of visions; the Spirit has united them (*ḥayyeḏ ʾennōn*) to the wondrous beauty.'

[163] See Alexander Treiger, 'Could Christ's Humanity See his Divinity? An Eighth-Century Controversy between John of Dalyatha and Timothy I, Catholicos of the Church of the East', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 19 (2019): 3–21. John of Dalyāthā was later reconciled to the Church by Timothy's successor and rival Ishōʿ bar Nūn (r. 823–827). However, as Treiger (ibid., 3, n. 6) points out, 'this rehabilitation must have been short-lived' because virtually no East Syrian manuscripts of John of Dalyāthā's works survive.

[164] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 33–35.

[165] Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 1:218.

ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Paradise of Eden*. In a poem on the Incarnation, our author cites unnamed authorities who provide the following analogy for the uniting of natures:

> Men of grace explained
> this mystery of the union,
> in which things given to uniting (*meṯḥaydānē*)
> came together in will and lordship.
> they distinguished the natures
> of divinity and lordship,
> and assembled into one union
> two blessed images.
> They illustrated their doctrine
> with a mystery concealed in their argument,
> which joins to itself both sound
> and written form.
> The radiance of the sphere of the essence (*ʾespērā d-ʾīṯūṯā*),
> they say, was reflected in a mirror (*maḥzīṯā*),
> which He forged from the human nature
> for the eyes of the discerning.[166]

In a gloss to these verses, ʿAbdīshōʿ unpacks this metaphor by explaining that a polished mirror (*maḥzīṯā mrīqtā*) is illumined by the light without change entering into the sun; and if the mirror were to break, no damage would be done to the sun. 'In like manner', he concludes, 'the divinity united with the humanity, with no pain entering into it by the sufferings of the humanity.'[167] The same argument re-emerges in the *Pearl* and *Durra*, though this time featuring the metaphor of light shining onto a precious jewel.[168]

But to whom does ʿAbdīshōʿ refer when he speaks of the transparency of wine and glass quoted previously in the *Farāʾid*? Although no further indication is given by our author, the expression comes from the famous Buyid statesman and litterateur Sāḥib ibn ʿAbbād (d. 995), who is recorded by the thirteenth-century biographer Ibn Khallikān as having produced the following lines of verse:

> Fine was the glass and the wine
> that the two resembled one another and appeared one.
> It was as if it were wine and not a drinking glass,
> and a drinking glass not wine.[169]

[166] *Paradise*, 11. [167] *Paradise*, 13–14. [168] *Pearl*, 18; *Durra*, ch. 5, § 142.
[169] Shams al-Dīn ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ wa-abnāʾ al-zamān*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1968–1972), 1:§ 92.

Interestingly, the above imagery features among Sufi thinkers of ʿAbdīshōʿ's time such as Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 1287), who employed it to convey a sense of unification with the Beloved.[170] Moreover, the 'polished mirror' as metaphor for the limpidity of the soul and its receptiveness to the divine Reality features in the works of al-Ghazālī (discussed above) and Jalāl al-dīn al-Rūmī (d. 1273).[171] It is tempting, therefore, to see ʿAbdīshōʿs use of such motifs as a means of commending the Christian doctrine of Incarnation to Muslims through an appeal to Sufism. However, while some Muslims believed it possible to receive visions of the divine, not all would have understood this as *actual* unification.[172] Al-Ghazālī cites Ibn ʿAbbād's wine verses several times to demonstrate the delusion of Sufis like Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī who claimed unification in moments of spiritual rapture and theophany.[173] Two centuries later, Ibn Taymiyya would cite them in a similar context in his polemic against Ibn ʿArabī.[174] As Carl Ernst has noted, other poetic expressions relating to wine from al-Ḥallāj's own *Diwān* were also criticized by Ibn Taymiyya 'because they seemed to imply a semi-Christian doctrine of incarnation' (*ḥulūl*).[175]

Yet even Sufis who espoused some form of unificationism often did so with all the caveats that such a phenomenon did not amount to incarnation. Al-Ghazālī concedes in his *Mishkāt al-anwār* ('Niches of Light') that a state of annihilation (*fanāʾ*) may be called 'unification' only metaphorically (*bi-lisān al-majāz ittiḥādan*).[176] Similarly, Ibn ʿArabī believed that the term *ittiḥād* could be applied as a metaphor to a specific state in which the worshipper ceases to distinguish

[170] Fakhr al-dīn al-ʿIrāqī, *Divine Flashes*, tr. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), 82.

[171] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, *The Mathnawī of Jalāl ud-dīn Rūmī*, tr. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, 2 vols. (Tehran: Nashr-i Būta, 2002), books 1:384–385 and 2:2909–2910, noted in passing by Brock, *The Imagery of the Spiritual Mirror*, 13, no. 26. See also Serafim Sepälä, *In Speechless Ecstasy: Expression and Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Classical Syriac and Sufi Literature* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2003), esp. 310–317 for some thoughtful parallels between the Syriac mystical and Sufi traditions concerning divine manifestation (though little mention is made of mirror imagery or Christology).

[172] On this issue generally, see Nile Green, 'The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13, no. 3 (2003): 287–313, esp. 294–299.

[173] See al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, 166; idem, *Iḥyāʾ*, 1:187, 2:411; idem, *Miʿrāj al-sālikīn*, in *Majmūʿat rasāʾil al-imām al-Ghazālī*, ed. Ibrāhīm Amīn Muḥammad (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqiyya, n.d.), 4, 85; idem, *The Niche of Lights/Mishkāt al-anwār*, ed. and tr. David Buchman (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), Part 1, § 47, cited in Treiger, 'al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology" ', 702. See also Quasem, 'al-Ghazālī's evaluation of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī', 153.

[174] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *al-Radd al-aqwam ʿalā mā fī Kitāb fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, in *Majmūʿat rasāʾil shaykh al-islām Ibn Taymiyya* (Cairo: n.p., 1365/1946), 46, cited in Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 425.

[175] Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 27, citing the verses: 'Your spirit was mixed in my Spirit, just as wine and clear water, and if something touches You, it touches me, for you are I in every state' and 'Praise be to Him whose humanity manifested the secret of the splendour of this radiant divinity, and who then appeared openly to his people in the form of one who eats and drinks!'

[176] al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, ch. 1, § 48, cited in Sepälä, *In Speechless Ecstasy*, 279.

God's actions from his own.[177] In reality, however, this state of unification is the result of two 'ones' (*wāḥidān*) rather than a single essence.[178] This understanding of unification was upheld by later Sufi authorities, namely ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 1330), Ibn ʿArabī's foremost commentator in ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime.[179] Other influential Sufis of the age also maintained the impossibility of union in any real sense, among them the Kubrawī Sufi ʿAlāʾ al-Dawlā Simnānī (d. 1336), for whom the ecstatic utterances of al-Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī resembled the Christian error of divine indwelling (*ḥulūl*).[180] As Jamal Elias has observed, Simnānī attempted to 'remove the possibility of divine indwelling in a created entity by incorporating a system of mirror imagery within his scheme of emanation'.[181] By viewing divine manifestation through a 'mirror' (*maẓhar*), the gnostic is able to recognize a figurative rather than definitive (as the Christians would have it) unification with the divine essence.[182]

Thus, rather than seeing ʿAbdīshōʿ's discussion of illumination and transparency as a direct appeal to any Muslim understanding of *ittiḥād*, it is likelier that our author articulates the mystery of the Incarnation through a common literary language—or what Marshall Hodgson terms a 'lettered tradition . . . naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims'—for expressing proximity to the divine.[183] However reliant upon this lexicon, though, Muslims and Christians ultimately subscribed to incommensurable notions of divine union: while some members of the former held to an imagined union between God and creation, the latter maintained that the union of God with Christ was in every sense real. It is remarkable nonetheless that ʿAbdīshōʿ integrates an Arabic poetic expression into the *Farāʾid*'s discussion of illumination and adds it to a list of Christological analogies that had been in development since Late Antiquity. ʿAbdīshōʿ was by no means the first to recognize the potential of Arabic literary topoi for

[177] For this understanding of *ittiḥād*, see Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ed. ʿUthmān Yaḥyā, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 2:31, 322, 4:71, cited in Angela Jaffray's commentary to idem, *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds*, ed. and tr. Angela Jaffray (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2006), 54–55.

[178] Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-alif wa-huwa Kitāb al-aḥadiyya* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1361/1942), 5, cited in quoted in Suʿād Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfī* (Beirut: Dandara li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1401/1981), 1180–1181. See also Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-masāʾil*, ed. Muḥammad Dāmādī (Tehran: Muʾassasa-i Muṭālaʿāt va Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1370/1991), 21.

[179] See ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, *Kitāb sharḥ ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī ʿalā Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam li-Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Maymaniyya, 1321/1903), 91. See also idem, *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. Shāhīn ʿAbd al-ʿĀl (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1413/1992), 49 on the definition of *ittiḥād* as 'the witnessing (*shuhūd*) of the presence of the Absolute One Truth (*wujūd al-Ḥaqq al-Wāḥid al-Muṭlaq*), as opposed to 'something with a specific existence that united with It, for this is absurd' (*lā min ḥaythu annā lahu wujūd khāṣṣ ittaḥada bihi fa-huwa muḥāl*).

[180] On Simnānī's views towards the Christian doctrine of Incarnation and the dangers of ecstatic utterances during mystical intoxication, see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, tr. Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1994). 127–130.

[181] Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ʿAlāʾ ad-Dawla as-Simnānī* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 61.

[182] Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God*, 62.

[183] Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:58.

Christological expression. Khamīs bar Qardāḥē (fl. 1280s) adapted the Arabic genre of wine verse (*khamriyyāt*) to Syriac poetry about the Eucharist and other theological subjects.[184] More germane here is an example by the West Syrian Patriarch of Antioch John bar Maʿdanī (d. 1263). The last two stanzas of his Syriac poem on the Incarnation is evocative of Ibn ʿAbbād's verses about the transparency of glass and wine beneath the sun's rays:

> Shining through the cup, it depicts mysteries of the union,
> for the two bodies share one brilliant, identical colour:
> the cup that of the wine, and the wine that of the cup,
> yet the distinction of their natures is preserved and unconfused.[185]

We may therefore observe in ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of Ibn ʿAbbād's verses, as in Bar Maʿdanī's, a further instance in which Christian authors employed cosmopolitan literary motifs to express core doctrines.

Returning now to the *Farāʾid* and its section on various modes of uniting, we find that ʿAbdīshōʿ once again refrains from attacking rival Christologies. After outlining different understandings of union, he states that all three Christian groups express the Incarnation (*tuʿabbiru ʿanhu*) through categories of will and volition; personality; dignity and honour; and illumination and effect.[186] It appears, therefore, that ʿAbdīshōʿ no longer considered these modes of uniting to be the preserve of the Church of the East. Once establishing this, he swiftly turns to a discussion of the Incarnation's necessity (*fī ḥaqīqat wujūbihi*)—thereby suggesting that he is more concerned with defending the doctrine *per se* than dwelling on intra-Christian differences.[187] It is here that the *Farāʾid*'s anti-Muslim apology begins in earnest, which we shall now address in the following sections of this chapter.

4.3 The Incarnation between Reason and Revelation

Having so far discussed the various ways ʿAbdīshōʿ negotiates intra-Christian difference, we now turn to his defence of the Incarnation against non-Christian attacks. Much of his apology focuses on the Incarnation as part of God's economy in the salvation of humankind. Earlier we noted the claim by Muslim and Jewish

[184] Taylor, 'Your Saliva is the Living Wine', 41, citing Khamīs bar Qardāḥē, *Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē: mēmrē w-mušḥāṭā*, ed. Shlīmōn Īshōʿ Khōshābā (Nohadra, Iraq: Prīsāṭā da-Nṣībīn, 2002), 203–204. For earlier examples of Syriac poetry featuring Eucharistic wine imagery that predates the Arabic genre of *khamriyyāt*, see Sebastian P. Brock, 'Sobria Ebrietas According to Some Syriac Texts', *ARAM* 17 (2005): 185–191.

[185] Bar Maʿdanī, *Mēmrē w-mušḥāṭā*, 42, translated in Taylor, *Your Saliva is the Living Wine*, 33–34.

[186] *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, § 10.

[187] *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, § 11.

polemicists that the doctrine of Incarnation insulted and compromised God's transcendence as a unitary being. ʿAbdīshōʿ addresses similar criticisms by arguing that God's appearance in human form was a necessary act of direct intervention in humankind's affairs. Such divine condescension was necessary for humans to participate in Christ's humanity for the sake of their salvation. These arguments are framed within an exegetical retelling of the biblical story of Jesus in the form of a parable which highlights the necessity of God's guidance and justice.

I argue in this section that the language of ʿAbdīshōʿ's parable resonates with various Islamic literary and theological themes, perhaps with the intention of garnering respectability for the doctrine of Incarnation, but also because such motifs had long been naturalized within Christian circles in the Islamicate world. In what follows I show that ʿAbdīshōʿ creatively repackages the arguments of earlier apologists by using literary and theological language that cut across faiths. Yet this shared *koinē* was not without its limits, as we shall see in the cases of Christ's mission, scriptural hermeneutics, and the unifying function of the soul. Nevertheless, arguments that emerged from earlier debates with Muslims would gradually make their way into a rich and ever-expanding canon of theology, mediated by ʿAbdīshōʿ to produce a comprehensive apology for the Incarnation.

4.3.1 The Incarnation as Divine Justice and Deception

When asked why it was necessary for God to incarnate Himself to save humankind, the answer usually provided by medieval Christian apologists was that He did so out of benevolence and generosity. As ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī explains, God does nothing vainly (*ʿabathan bi-lā maʿnā*). His incarnation, therefore, must have been motivated by His generosity (*jūd*), benevolence (*karam*), and omnipotence (*jabrūt*).[188] Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī similarly reasons that God's unwillingness or inability to unite with Christ's humanity would imply meanness (*bukhl*) on His part. But because the attribute of meanness is at variance with what is known of His essence, it must have been His generosity (*jūd*) that necessitated the uniting of natures.[189] Throughout the thirteenth century Christian apologists such as Paul of Antioch, the author of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*, Paul al-Būshī, and Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿAssāl continued to see the Incarnation as the ultimate expression of God's benevolence towards creation.[190]

[188] al-Baṣrī, *al-Masāʾil*, 215.

[189] Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 69–72. Note also that in his edition of the text, Périer erroneously corrects *wujūb al-taʾannus* to *wujūd al-taʾannus*, which has been refuted by Samir Khalil Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity', in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57–114, here 74, n. 56.

[190] Ebied and Thomas, 140 (text), 141 (trans.); Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, *al-Qawl ʿalā wujūb al-taʾannus*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 23, §§ 9–21, here 9 (al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl's abridgement); al-Būshī, *Maqāla fī al-tathlīth wa-tajassud*, §§ 87–93.

In accordance with earlier writers, ʿAbdīshōʿ affirms the principle that benevolence was the primary motive for the Incarnation. He demonstrates this in his *Pearl* and *Durra* by employing what Barbara Roggema has identified in Melkite apologies as 'king parables'.[191] A pertinent example comes from the *Kitāb al-burhān* of Peter of Bayt Raʾs (fl. ca. tenth century) in which he provides a parable (*mathal*) of a king who goes incognito among his people in order to improve their affairs. In summary, a royal servant rebels against the king and leads his subjects in revolt. Not wishing to alarm his subjects into obedience, the king decides to conceal his identity (*an yastatira ʿan jamīʿ al-ʿabīd*) and disguise himself as a commoner for the sake of those wishing to be saved from the wickedness of his former servant. By means of this deception (*iḥtiyāl*), the king reforms his subjects and exposes the injustice of the rebellious servant.[192] A similar parable occurs in a literary Christian–Muslim debate of Melkite provenance that takes place in 1217 between a monk named George and the Ayyūbid governor al-Malik al-Mushammar, son of the famous Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. During one session of the disputation, the latter wishes to know why it was necessary for God to suffer the humiliations of Christ in order to save humankind when he could have done so in a less laborious way.[193] In reply, the monk offers a parable similar to that in Peter of Bayt Raʾs's *Kitāb al-burhān*.[194] Another medieval apology by a Melkite named Gerasimus (about whom little is known) registers an objection by a Muslim who asks why it was necessary for God to incarnate Himself. Gerasimus responds with yet another king parable.[195]

The use of such parables was not restricted to the Melkite milieu. The Copto-Arabic writer Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ also made extensive use of it in his *Kitāb al-*

[191] Barbara Roggema, '*Ḥikāyāt amthāl wa asmār*… : King Parables in Melkite Apologetic Literature', in *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage in Honour of Father Prof. Dr Samir Khalil Samir S.I. at the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Rifaat Ebied and Herman G.B. Teule (Peeters: Leuven, 2004), 113–131.

[192] Ps.-Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Book of the Demonstration (Kitāb al-burhān)*, ed. and tr. Paul Cachia and Montgomery Watt, 2 vols., CSCO 209–210 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1961–1962), 2: §§ 238–239. Although attributed by the editors to Eutychius of Alexandria, the work has since been shown to belong to Peter of Bayt Ra's; see Samir Khalil Samir, 'La littérature Melkite sous les premiers Abbasides', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 56 (1990): 469–486, here 482–484.

[193] Barbara Roggema ('King Parables', 129) expresses doubt about whether such a question was ever asked by a Muslim critic of Christianity, asserting that its occurrence in the *Disputation* was 'merely to facilitate a further explanation of the rightfulness of the defeat of Satan'. While this assumption might be correct from the perspective of the *Disputation*'s author, we have already noted above, in Section 4.1, that medieval Muslims did indeed asked why Christians believed the elaborateness of God's redemptive mission to be necessary.

[194] Jirjis al-Simʿānī, *al-Naṣrāniyya wa-l-islām: difāʿ mansūb ilā al-ab Jirjis rāhib dayr Mār Simʿān al-Baḥrī amāma al-amīr al-ẓāhir al-mulaqqab bi-l-Malik al-Mushammar ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, 1207 m.*, ed. Būlus Qaraʾlī (Beit Chebab, Lebanon: Imprimerie al-Alam, 1933), 423–426.

[195] Gerasimus, *Defending Christian Faith: The Fifth Part of the Christian Apology of Gerasimus*, ed. and tr. Abjar Bahkou (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), § 88–192, 214–240. Gerasimus offers additional analogies for why God condescended to man, namely, the horseman who is obliged to dismount in order to keep up with those travelling on foot and the boatman who must undress and dive into the water in order to teach someone how to swim. Gerasimus, *Defending Christian Faith*, §§ 108–110.

bayān.[196] Aside from the obvious Gospel precedent (Jesus himself used parables), Roggema has convincingly shown that the development of this apologetic strategy was closely tied to the Christian interpretation of such Qurʾānic passages as Q 42:51: 'God does not speak to humans except from behind a veil'; Q 24:35: 'God presents examples (*amthāl*) to the people'; Q 4:172: 'Christ would not disdain to be a servant' (*lan yastankifa al-masīḥ an yakūna ʿabdan*); and Q 3:54: 'God is the best of devisers' (*khayr al-mākirīn*).[197] Thus, king parables functioned to help a Christian audience understand key aspects of the Incarnation, on the one hand, while justifying the doctrine to hypothetical Muslim critics, on the other.

Connected to the idea of divine deception was that of incremental revelation. In short, God's beneficence meant that He offered humankind more than one chance at salvation, initially through the prophets and ultimately through Christ. Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and the anonymous *Letter from the People of Cyprus* state that God's beneficence meant that His revelation came in stages. The first was the 'law of justice' (*sharīʿat al-ʿadl*), instituted by Moses to the people of Israel; the second was the 'law of grace' (*sharīʿat al-faḍl*), which came in the form of God's union with the humanity assumed from Mary.[198] In thirteenth-century Syriac sources we also encounter the idea that the Incarnation was the last of several attempts to reform humankind. In his *Zqōrā mlaḥma*, Bar Zōʿbī begins his discussion of the Incarnation with an extensive salvation history. Prior to His sending of the prophets, humankind lived in a state of 'natural law' (*nāmōsā kyānāyā*), which afforded them the freedom to choose between good and evil.[199] After disregarding this law, God sent humankind a 'scriptural law' (*nāmōsā kṯāḇāyā*), entrusted to Moses and intended solely for the people of Israel.[200] Finally, after realizing that humankind would not be saved by prophecy alone, God decided to intervene in a more direct manner:

> And so when the Creator saw
> that the Son's image (*ṣalmā da-ḇrā, scil.* humankind) had been corrupted,
> His mercies became manifest, his love was stirred,
> and He sent [His] grace to aid them.
> He sent the first righteous ones,
> but they were unable to reform them (*da-nqīmūnāyhy*).
> Then He sent the prophets,
> but they too could not reform them.

[196] Cited and discussed by Stephen J. Davies, *Coptic Christology: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 230–236.
[197] Roggema, 'King Parables', 130.
[198] Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 140 (text), 141 (trans.).
[199] Bar Zōʿbī, *Zqōrā mlaḥmā*, 17r–17v. [200] Bar Zōʿbī, *Zqōrā mlaḥmā*, 19v–20r.

Little by little and through examples,
they spoke to humankind,
yet the two together were not enough
to help them.
Finally, He sent them
a *qnōmā* from His nature,
and one of the essence's *hypostases*
dwelled in and saved humankind.
From the tribe of Abraham
he chose a mother, his [*scil.* Christ's] begetter;
without human seed
she conceived him from the Holy Spirit.[201]

In other words, after repeated failures by the prophets to save humankind, God directly interceded by incarnating himself as an act of selfless beneficence.

It is in a similar vein that ʿAbdīshōʿ sets out his salvation history, though in his telling he makes use of king parables. He begins a section of the *Pearl* on 'the Christian dispensation' (*ʿal mdabrānūṯā kresṭyānīṯā*) by stating that God's justice (*kēnūṯā*) is a benefit to all of humankind (*ṭāḇṯā [h]y l-ḡāwā da-ḇnaynāšā*). This justice necessitated His sending of prophets to entice his servants away from sin and the worship of idols.[202] Since the prophets repeatedly failed in their task, God was left no other choice but to directly intercede in humankind's affairs. ʿAbdīshōʿ makes the following analogy:

> God's manifestation in our world is like a king who sends many emissaries (*ʾīzgaddē*) to dispense his governance and to reform (*l-ṯurrāṣ*) those ruled by him If they are overcome by weakness and unable to effect anything, he goes out in person (*ba-qnōmeh*) to reform the people of the country.[203]

But why was it necessary for God to assume human form in order to carry out this redemptive mission? ʿAbdīshōʿs answer is that 'because God is invisible (*lā meṯḥazyānā*), if He were to appear to humans, all of creation would be destroyed by the splendour of His light' (*zahrā d-nuhreh*).[204] In this way our author attempts to provide a response—albeit implicit—to potential critics who might ask why God could not have carried out his redemptive mission in a less elaborate way. It is also this understanding of the Incarnation that underpins ʿAbdīshōʿs interpretation of Jn 1:14: 'The Word became flesh and made its dwelling among us':

[201] Bar Zōʿbī, *Zqōrā mlaḥmā*, 19r–20r. [202] *Pearl*, 17. [203] *Pearl*, 17. [204] *Pearl*, 18.

> For this reason, He took for Himself (*nsaḇ leh*) a man for His dwelling (*la-ʿmūryeh*) and made him His temple and habitation. He united (*ḥaydeh*) His divinity to the mortal being, [in] an eternal and inseparable union, and participated with it (*šawtpeh ʿammeh*) in lordship, authority, and majesty.[205]

In ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra* a far more elaborate version of the parable appears, forming part of a lengthy discourse on the purposefulness of God's action. Earlier on in this work—and in line with earlier apologists such as John of Antioch and the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*—ʿAbdīshōʿ asserts that God's beneficence necessitated His revelation of a law of justice (*sunnat al-ʿadl*), which He entrusted to Moses and the prophets. The purpose of this law of justice was to move humankind from a state of natural, primordial law (*sunnat al-ṭabīʿa*) to a state of reason and restraint (*sunnat al-ʿaql*). Humankind's rejection and persecution of the prophets, however, compelled God to abrogate the Law of Justice by replacing it with a Law of Grace (*sunnat al-tafaḍḍul*) preached by Christ.[206] Recalling the attribute apology of his Trinitarian writings (discussed in Chapter 3), ʿAbdīshōʿ later states that God does not act out of a desire for compensation, reward, or anything lacking in His essence. Rather, the prime motive (*al-sabab al-dāʿī*) for His creation was none other than His generosity (*jūd*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*).[207] As such, the Incarnation was part—and indeed the outcome—of a broader salvation history:

> Since He is generous, wise, and compassionate, and it is uncharacteristic of wisdom and generosity to neglect the good of beings, it is necessary that His providence (*ʿināyatuhu*) in His creation be [a matter of] constant favour (*dāʾimat al-alṭāf*)[208] and manifest improvement [...]. For whoever examines the changing predicaments of humankind, how [seemingly] adverse forces provide them with benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) by [His] divine decree (*al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*), their survival and sustenance in a world imbricated with evil, and their guidance towards resisting every evil with what dispels harm (*bi-mā yadfaʿu ḍararahu al-maḥḍhūr*) [...]—they will find that [His] providence envelops all beings.[209]

It is here that ʿAbdīshōʿ begins to elucidate this premise with a king parable. But before proceeding, it is worth noting that terms like *luṭf* (pl. *alṭāf*), *al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*, and *dafʿ al-ḍarar* featured prominently among Muslim *kalām* scholars. For the Muʿtazilites, *luṭf* ('facilitating grace') was used to express the obligatory nature of God's creation of benefits (*manāfiʿ*) and advantages (*maṣāliḥ*) to guide humankind towards good, through the sending of prophets and other modes of

[205] *Pearl*, 18. [206] *Durra*, ch. 3, §§ 8–42. [207] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 20.
[208] Reading *alṭāf* for *ilṭāf*. [209] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 10–17.

intercession (*shafāʿa*).[210] Closely related is the Muʿtazilite notion of *dafʿ al-ḍarar* (lit. 'the prevention of injury'), which held that God must, by logical necessity, provide humans with the means of avoiding harm, at least in matters of religion.[211] In contrast to the Muʿtazilites, who maintained that humans were the authors of their own actions, the Ashʿarites held that humans received divine reward not by their own actions but by God's predetermination, often expressed as *al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*.[212] The term, however, was understood in a more general, less deterministic sense by Muʿtazilites as God's omnipotence, insofar as He possesses the ability to exercise power over humankind through guidance.[213]

The significance of ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of these terms will be discussed shortly. For now, let us return to the *Durra*'s king parable, which runs as follows:

> The likeness of humankind before God (may He be exalted) is like that of a wise king to a village containing a great many people whose healthy are ignorant and whose intelligent are infirm. Owing to his majesty, power, and grandeur, it is not possible for a lord to directly interfere in the affairs of the people of his village. He therefore sends them messengers whom he entrusts with knowledge and action to cure them, educate their ignorant, and guide their misled. However, the task proves too much for the messengers because of the immensity of the disease of the afflicted and the evil of the foolish.
>
> And so, owing to the generosity and wisdom by which he was characterised and the fact that his concern (*ʿināyā*) for them was a matter for celebration, there was nothing left but for him to go to them who were on the brink of ruin. Since assailing them with his soldiers and horses would only increase the sickness of the afflicted and exacerbate the ignorance of the foolish [. . .], the king decided, by the subtlety of his deception (*bi-luṭf iḥtiyālihi*), to assume a low profile

[210] See George Fadlo Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 106; Robert Brunschvig, 'Muʿtazilisme et Optimum (*al-aṣlaḥ*)', *Studia Islamica*, no. 39 (1974): 5–23; Oliver Leaman, 'Luṭf', *EI*[2] 5 (1986): 833–834; Binyamin Abrahamov, "Abd al-Jabbar's Theory of Divine Assistance', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 16 (1993): 41–58.

[211] See J.R.T.M. Peters, *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Muʿtazilî Qâḍî l-Quḍât Abû l-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Jabbâr bn Aḥmad al-Hamaḏânî* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 91; Margaretha T. Heemskerk, *Suffering in the Muʿtazilite Theology: ʿAbd al-Jabbār's Teaching on Pain and Divine Justice* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 121–122.

[212] For useful overviews of the Classical Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite positions, see L. Gardet, 'al-Ḳaḍāʾ wa-l-ḳadar', *EI*[2] 4 (1978): 365–367; Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982), 241–305; Richard M. Frank, 'The Autonomy of the Human Agent according to the Teaching of ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār', *Le Muséon* 95, no. 3–4 (1982): 323–355.

[213] For this non-deterministic understanding of *al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*, see Abū Ṭālib Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq al-Buṭḥānī, *Ziyādat sharḥ al-uṣūl* in Camilla Adang et al., *Baṣran Muʿtazilite Theology: Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Khallād's* Kitāb al-uṣūl *and its Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 297–298; anonymous, *Khulāṣat al-naẓar*, in Sabine Schmidtke and Hasan Ansari, *An Anonymous Imāmī-Muʿtazilī Treatise (Late 6th/12th or Early 7th/13th Century* (Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy and Institute of Islamic Studies, 2006), 103–104.

> (*istishʿār al-khumūl*)[214] and disguise himself. Thus, he appeared as one of them and removed the harm (*amāṭa al-ḍarr*) and shackless of foolishness from them until their sick became healthy, their stutterers became eloquent, their ignorant became learned, and their perishing became healthy.
>
> He thus left them for the palaces of his kingdom and sent his messengers to his subjects to make known to them that he was their physician and through him their guidance and reformation was achieved. He did this for two reasons. Firstly, that they would give thanks to his graciousness; and secondly that they would continue down the path of curing their illnesses and correcting their defects. With his support, he granted them power and skill so that the people of the village would not doubt that they were sent by him. And so they followed in his footsteps by healing and educating until most of the people in the village reached the peak of health and refinement.[215]

Once concluding his parable, ʿAbdīshōʿ immediately unpacks its themes: the king at the beginning of the narrative is the pre-incarnate God; the villagers are His servants; his messengers who failed to improve their affairs are the prophets; the incognito king is the incarnate Christ; and his subsequent messengers are the apostles.[216] Concerning the sending of the prophets and divine justice, ʿAbdīshōʿ reaffirms the obligatory nature of God's favour towards humankind despite their repeated disobedience, once again employing notions of grace.[217] As for God's union with Christ's human nature, ʿAbdīshōʿ follows the *Pearl* by explaining that since the divine essence is comprised 'of simplicity, subtlety, incorporeality, and luminosity' (*min al-basāṭā wa-l-laṭāfa wa-l-rūḥāniyya wa-l-nūrāniyya*), if He were to appear in It, the heavens and earth would be destroyed by Its splendour (*la-ḍmaḥallat min bahāʾihi*), leading Him to manifest His Word 'in veiled form' (*fī ḥijāb al-ṣūra*).[218] Similarly, ʿAbdīshōʿ explains in his *Khuṭba* that 'the divinity assumed a human form as a veil against Its brilliant radiance and a gate into Its hidden mysteries'.[219]

[214] For *raʾā al-malik … istishʿār al-khumūl*, Gianazza's translation reads: 'il re … fu consapevole del sentimento di indolenza' ('the king … was aware of the feeling of indolence'). This translation is unwarranted because the verbal noun *istishʿār* is apposite to *raʾā* ('he decided'); and while *khumūl* can mean 'indolence', it also has the sense of 'obscurity' or 'being unknown'. Furthermore, while the verb *istashʿara* can mean 'to sense' or 'to perceive', the meaning here is 'to put on' or 'clad' and can be used in relation to garments; see Edward William Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893), 2:812–813 for *khumūl* and 5:1560 for *istishʿār*. This interpretation certainly fits the context of 'Abdīshōʿ's parable, especially given the importance of clothing metaphors in Christological discourse (previously discussed).

[215] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 22–37.

[216] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 41–46.

[217] For example: *Durra*, ch. 4, § 44: 'Due to His compassion towards his worshippers, the Creator never ceases to emanate His generosity and blessing on them, show them favour (*yalṭufu bi-him*), and illuminate the way for them by His gracious wisdom (*laṭīf ḥikmatihi*).'

[218] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 20–23.

[219] *Khuṭba*, § 20: *ittakhadhat al-lāhūt ṣūrat al-nāsūt ḥijāban li-sāṭiʿ anwārihā wa-bāban li-ghāmiḍ asrārihā*.

The parable's motifs would have been readily recognizable to a Christian audience who needed reminding of why the Incarnation came to be. The incognito king was a common literary motif in medieval Arabic genres of storytelling that crossed confessional boundaries. This perhaps accounts for why some Christian Arabic theologians deemed the parable so rhetorically and stylistically effective. The famous *Thousand and One Nights*, for example, contains tales of kings who disguise themselves as commoners to observe their subjects, most famously the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.[220] Edifying king parables were also common in other medieval works of Arabic literature, some of which had Indian and Persian intertexts. Among the most important of these was the *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsaf*, a hagiographic tale originating from a Sanskrit biography of Buddha that passed into Arabic as early as the eighth century, possibly through a Manichaean Pahlavi intermediary.[221] By the eleventh century, the story had found its way (via Georgian) into a Greek translation traditionally ascribed to John of Damascus, whence emerged Christian Arabic, Ethiopic, and Latin versions.[222] All versions relate how the ascetic Bilawhar (Barlaam in the Greek) disguised himself as a merchant and entered the confidence of the king Būdhāsaf (Ioasaph in the Greek), whose character he attempts to reform through fables and allegories.[223]

Strikingly similar to ʿAbdīshōʿ's king parable is Bilawhar's fable about the wise physician and the city of the mad. Not found in Christian versions of the legend, the fable relates how one physician came to cure an entire city of its madness (*junūn*). Realizing that others had previously failed to treat the inhabitants, the king decides to send them a physician of immense wisdom and skill. By exercising greater ingenuity (*min afḍal ḥiyalihi*) the physician takes the city's inhabitants

[220] See Hasan M. El-Shamy, *A Motif Index of the Thousand and One Nights* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 498; David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 82ff on the moralizing character of the caliph's adventures and its medieval Islamic context.

[221] I use here the so-called Ismaʿīlī version published by Daniel Gimaret (ed.), *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsaf* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1972). For the text's background, transmission, and other Arabic versions, see David M. Lang, 'Bilawhar wa-Yūdāsaf', *EI²* 1 (1986): 1215–1217; J.P. Asmussen, 'Barlaam and Iosaph', *EIr* 3, no. 8 (1988): 801; Isabel Toral-Niehoff, 'Die Legende *Barlaam und Josaphat* in der arabisch-muslimischen Literatur. Ein arabistischer Beitrag zur "*Barlaam*-Frage," *Die Welt des Orients* 31 (2000–2001): 110–144; Regula Forster, 'Barlaam and Josaphat', *EI³* 1 (2012): 83–86; idem, 'Buddha in Disguise: Problems in the Transmission of Barlaam and Josaphat', in *Acteurs des transferts culturels en Méditerranée médiévale*, ed. Rania Abdellatif (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 180–191.

[222] For the Greek version, I use here Ps.-John of Damascus, *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, ed. and tr. G.R. Woodward and H. Mattingly (London: Heinemann, 1937). On the various Christian versions of the Bilawhar, see Toni Bräm, 'Le roman de *Barlaam* et Josaphat', in Richard Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* 2 (1994): 63–83; Donald S. Lopez and Peggy McCracken, *In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company); Toral-Niehoff, 'Die Legende *Barlaam und Josaphat*', 128. While no Syriac version of the tale has come down to us, two parables from the Islamic text were incorporated by Barhebraeus into his *Tunnāyē mḡaḥkānē* ('Laughable Stories'); see Sebastian P. Brock, 'Barlaam and Josaphat', *GEDSH*, 58.

[223] Gimaret, *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsaf*, 33–34; Ps. John of Damascus, *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 63–67.

unawares, treating them one after the other until most of the city is cured. Before returning to the king, the physician entrusts a group of followers to continue administering the cure. At the end of the fable Bilawhar explains that the king is none other than God, the physician is the enlightened ascetic (*al-budd*, from 'Buddha'), the city is this world, and the madness the world's vanities.

Given the striking correspondences in the *Durra*'s parable, it is not inconceivable that ʿAbdīshōʿ had first-hand knowledge of the Bilawhar legend and consciously sought to extract new meaning from it. If so, he was by no means the first: a strikingly similar parable occurs in the epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ ('Brethren of Purity'), a tenth-century fraternity of Muslim philosophers based in Baghdad whose learned epistles were popular in subsequent periods.[224] As Ian Netton has observed, the starting point of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾs parable is the *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsaf* and reflects the 'theme of the philosopher or prophet as the doctor of souls'[225]—though in this instance, the story has a markedly Islamic flavour. In the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾs telling, the wiseman enters a city whose common folk are ailed by an illness of which they are unaware. All his attempts to help them, however, are met with hostility, and so his advice goes unheeded. Moved by compassion for his fellow man (*li-shiddat shafqatihi ʿala ahl jinsihi*), he decides to cure them through deception (*fa-ḥtāla ʿalayhim*), offering one man a tincture and purgative in which the cure is hidden. In return, the wiseman asks only that his patient take him to friends and kin who might be cured, who in turn administer the cure to their kin. The wiseman continues to do this until his mission gains momentum, after which time the cure is revealed and his followers are able to administer it with greater force. This, the author explains, is how prophethood works: since the Quraysh were initially hostile to Muḥammad's message, the prophet chose instead to win over those closest to him such as his wife Khadīja, his cousin ʿAlī, and his friend Abū Bakr. Only later, once a movement of trusted followers was consolidated, did Muḥammad reveal his message to the masses.[226] To be sure, ʿAbdīshōʿ's parable and that of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ differ in important regards. For example, in ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme, God's deception is motivated by his love for creation, much as a king acts out of love for his subjects. In the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's parable, however, the wiseman, though superior in wisdom, is otherwise equal to the people he seeks to help. Nevertheless, in both cases, divine mercy is conceived as gradual,

[224] On their later influence, see Godefroid de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 107–111.

[225] Ian R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 91. Cf. Gimaret, *Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdhasf*, 91.

[226] Epistle 44 in Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Companionship and Belief: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 43–45*, ed. and tr. Samer F. Traboulsi et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 29–38 (text), 73–78 (trans.).

involving as it does stages of benign deception, moral reformation, and, lastly, disclosure of the source of revelation.

Equally implicit in ʿAbdīshōʿ's parable is, I believe, the argument that the existence of human free will necessitated God's action. The interplay between divine providence and free will had long occupied the minds of Syriac and Arabic Christian exegetes by the thirteenth century.[227] ʿAbdīshōʿ himself explicitly affirms it in a section on Creation in the *Pearl*, asserting that one of the ways in which God made humans in His likeness was by endowing them with free will (*ḥēʾrūṯ ṣeḇyānā*).[228] He further contends that God allowed humankind to fall on account of their freedom of action. For had they not been free agents, He would have wronged them for punishing their transgression; but if they truly possessed freedom of action, He would have punished them justly (*kēʾnāʾīṯ ḥayyeḇ ʾennōn*).[229] With this in mind, the subtext to the *Durra*'s parable becomes clearer: because humans possess freedom of action, the ruse of God's Incarnation was necessary to set them in order without compelling them.

The value of this argument was recognized by other apologists. Gerasimus, for example, tells his Muslim interlocutor that humankind would not have known the value of God's mercy had He robbed them of their free will. God's appearance in human form, therefore, ensured that humankind would follow Him out of choice rather than divine grace alone.[230] Yet what is remarkable about the *Durra*'s discussion of God's economy is its repeated use of terms like *lutf* and its derivatives, which call to mind aspects of Muʿtazilite theologians who considered humans to be induced rather than compelled by God's facilitating grace. The Muʿtazilites further held that God was logically obligated to provide these inducements, since His wisdom and benevolence prevent Him from acting against humankind.[231] Thus, the double meaning of *lutf* in ʿAbdīshōʿ's parable of the king's deception becomes all the more meaningful, since it carries the sense of both 'subtlety' and 'favour'. As we observed in the passage above, ʿAbdīshōʿ states that the king deceived his subjects

[227] Taeke Jansma, 'Ephraem on Exodus ii, 5: Reflections on the Interplay of Human Freewill and Divine Providence', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39, no. 1 (1973): 5–28; Tanios Bou Mansour, 'La liberté chez saint Éphrem I[e] Syrien', *Parole de'Orient* 11 (1983): 89–156; 12 (1984–1985), 3–89; Sydney H. Griffith, 'Free Will in Christian *kalām*: The Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurra', *Parole de'Orient* 14 (1987): 79–107; idem, 'Free Will in Christian *kalām*: Moshe bar Kepha against the Teachings of the Muslims', *Le Muséon* 100 (1987): 143–159.

[228] *Pearl*, 11. [229] *Pearl*, 12.

[230] Gerasimus, *Defending Christian Faith*, §§ 145–147; Abjar Bahkou, '*Kitāb al-kāfī fī al-mʿanā al-šāfī (The Complete Book of the Proper Meaning)*: The Christian Apology of Gerasimus', *Parole de'Orient* 34 (2009): 309–343, here 331.

[231] Al-Buṭḥānī, *Ziyādāt al-sharḥ*, 132; Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Minhāj fī uṣūl al-dīn*, in Sabine Schmidtke, *A Muʿtazilite creed of az-Zamaḫšarî (d. 538/1144): al-Minhâǧ fî uṣûl ad-dîn* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft; Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner, 1997), 29–31 (text), 67 (trans.); anon. *Khulāṣat al-naẓar*, 94–96; Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb al-Fāʾiq fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Martin J. McDermott (Tehran: Muʾassasa-ʾi Pizhūhishī-i Ḥikmat va Falsafa-ʾi Īrān va Muʾassasa-ʾi Muṭālaʿāt-i Islāmī Dānishgāh-i Āzād-i Birlīn, 2007), 252–256.

'by subtlety of his deception' (*bi-lutf iḥtiyālihi*), suggesting perhaps that God's ruse was a necessary act of grace if humans were to accept divine justice by choice.

While the Syriac and Christian Arabic reception of Muʿtazilism has yet to be studied in detail, we can say with certainty that aspects of the tradition's ethics and theodicy were known to medieval Christian authors. In the ninth 'base' of Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum*, the West Syrian prelate names two groups who affirm man's freedom of action: the first are the Muʿtazilite Muslims (*mašlmānē d-meṯqrēn muʿtazilāyē*) and the second are the Christians, both of whom uphold the principle of human liberty (*ḥē'rūṯ ṣebyānā*), insofar as it is guided to good by divine providence (*bṭīlūṯā*) and bad through Satanic incitement (*gurrāḡā sātānāyā*).[232] Moreover, Gregor Schwarb has brought to light a Christian rejoinder to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's argument for predestination by the Copto-Arabic author Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Ṭayyib, who, against predestinationist Christians in his own community, argues that free will is necessary for man to fulfil the scripture's eschatological promises.[233] Here, Abū al-Khayr elucidates his conception of free will 'by means of a parable comparing a human agent to a gardening landscape contractor commissioned to rebuild a recreational park for the king'.[234] By the turn of the fourteenth century, issues of free will and God's actions were very much alive among theologians, especially as Muʿtazilite thought had become increasingly naturalized within Karaite Jewish, Zaydī, and Twelver Shīʿī circles.[235] The most prominent representatives of the latter during ʿAbdīshōʿ's time were Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, successors to the Baṣra school of Muʿtazilite thought, each of whom applied theories of *lutf* to their writings on prophecy and the imamate.[236]

[232] Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Le Candélabre du sanctuaire de Grégoire Abou'lfaradj dit Barhebraeus: Neuvième base: du libre arbitre*, ed. and trans. Paul-Hubert Poirier, Patrologia Orientalis 43, fasc. 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 14 (text), 15 (trans.).

[233] Gregor Schwarb, 'The 13th Century Copto-Arabic Reception of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Al-Rashīd Abū l-Khayr Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Risālat bayān al-aẓhār fī radd ʿalā man yaqūlu bi-l-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*', *The Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 2 (2014): 143–169, here 155.

[234] Schwarb, 'The 13th Century Copto-Arabic Reception of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī', 160. A much later Copto-Arabic discussion comes from the *Mukhtaṣar al-bayān fī taḥqīq al-īmān* of al-Makīn ibn al-ʿAmīd. Here, the author claims the Muʿtazilites as allies in a discourse against predetermination; see Mark N. Swanson, 'Christian Engagement with Islamic *kalām* in Late 14th Century Egypt: The Case of *al-Ḥāwī* of al-Makīn Jirjīs Ibn al-ʿAmīd "the Younger"', *The Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 2 (2014): 214–226.

[235] On this diffusion, see Wilferd Madelung, 'Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology', in *Le Shīʿisme imâmite: colloque de Strasburg (6–9 Mai 1968)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 13–30; Jan Thiele, 'Propagating Muʿtazilism in the VI/XIIth Zaydiyya: The Role of al-Ḥassan al-Raṣṣāṣ', *Arabica* 57 (2010): 536–558; David Sklare, 'Levi ben Yefet and his *Kitāb al-Nīʿma*: Selected Texts', in *A Common Rationality: Muʿtazilism in Islam and Judaism*, ed. Camilla Adang et al. (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007), 157–218.

[236] Al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, 135; Henri Laoust, 'Les fondements de l'imamat dans le *Minhāǧ* d'al-Ḥillī', *Revue des études islamiques* 46 (1978): 3–55, here 7–8. See also Madelung, 'Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology', 27–28; Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī*, 104–109 (on the nature of God's justice and His obligation to act in man's best interest), 125–135 (on free will); Rizvi, 'II: Later Shīʿī Theology', 93–94.

As we have seen, the principle that the Incarnation was motivated by God's benevolence was well grounded in Arabic Christian thought by ʿAbdīshōʿ's time. This is also true of the topos of the wise king who is moved by wisdom and benevolence to improve the condition of his subjects. ʿAbdīshōʿ's framing of the Incarnation as an act of divine justice, therefore, is noteworthy in its appeal to theological motifs understood by both Christians and Muslims—despite the key differences they held over the implications that such an incarnation would have regarding God's transcendence.

4.3.2 The Incarnation between Scriptures

As already noted, many Muslim theologians rejected the divinity of Christ by polemically reinterpreting biblical passages, most often drawn from the Gospel of John. In response, Syriac and Arabic Christian theologians affirmed the divinity of the Johannine Christ by repurposing their exegetical traditions for apologetic ends. One notable example is Jesus's statement in Jn 20:17 that 'I am ascending to my father and your father, my God and your God', described by Martin Accad as 'the ultimate proof-text' for Muslim and Christian theologians alike.[237] In his disputation with al-Mahdī, Timothy is confronted with the caliph's assertion that this passage contradicts the doctrine of Christ's divine sonship. In response the catholicos states that the clauses 'my God' and 'your God' indicate the eternal Word, while 'my Father' and 'your Father' indicate the Word's putting on (*lb̲ūšeh d-melṭā*) of human flesh.[238] Arguably, Timothy draws on established exegetical authority, since Theodore of Mopsuestia provides a Diophysite reading of the same verse, stating that the human nature was assumed (*ʾeṯnseb̲*) by the Word and underwent conjunction with the divine nature (*hwāṯ leh naqqīpūṯā lwāṯ kyānā ʾalāhāyā*).[239] Īshōʿdād of Merv, who flourished a century after Timothy asserts that Christ meant 'my Father' and 'my God' by nature (*kyānā*), and 'your Father' and 'your God' by grace ('your' indicating the disciples and the rest of humanity). Thus, for Īshōʿdād, Christ's statement in Jn 20:17 encapsulates the very definition of union (*ḥḏāyūṯā*) because the clauses 'my father' and 'my God' indicate the distinction between the natures and *qnōmē* united in Christ's single Person (*parṣōpā*) by

[237] See Martin Accad, 'The Gospels in the Muslim and Christian Exegetical Discourse: A Thematic and Chronological Study of Muslim and Christian (Syriac and Arabic) Sources of the Crucial Period in the History of the Development of Arab Christianity' (PhD diss, University of Oxford, 2001), 316–376; idem, 'The Ultimate Proof-Text: The Interpretation of John 20.17 in Muslim–Christian Dialogue (Second/Eighth–Eighth/Fourteenth Centuries)', in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in ʿAbbasid Iraq*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 199–214.

[238] Timothy, *Disputation mit dem Kalifen*, §§ 3,15–3,20.

[239] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis Apostoli*, ed. and trans. Jacques-Marie Vosté, CSCO 115–116 (Paris: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1940), 350 (text), 251 (trans.).

conjunction (*naqqīpūṯā*).[240] Similarly, when faced with the same challenge regarding the exegesis of Jn 20:17, Elias bar Shennāyā argues in his *majlis* with al-Maghribī that the verse demonstrates that the prophets and disciples were equal to Christ in prophethood (*nubuwwa*) because the term 'indwelling' (*ḥulūl*) is applicable to both—but not in sonship (*bunuwwa*), since only in Christ did God's indwelling entail union.[241]

A further strategy employed by Christian apologists was to turn to the Qur'ān in defence of the Incarnation. ʿAmr ibn Mattā (fl. late tenth/early eleventh century), in his *Kitāb al-majdal*, cites Q 3:55 ('O Jesus son of Mary, I am causing you to die [*mutawaffīka*] and raising you to Myself [*rāfiʿuka ilayya*]') and Q 5:117 ('when You took me up, You were Observer unto them') as proof that only Christ's humanity suffered and died on the Cross without admitting change (*taghayyur*) to his divine nature.[242] In his *Majālis*, Elias Bar Shennāyā alludes to instances in the Qur'ān where God is said to sit on a throne and Jesus is referred to as Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*).[243] Furthermore, in a letter to al-Maghribī, Bar Shennāyā cites Q 3:55 as proof of Christ's elevation to the highest degree (*irtifāʿihi ilā ghāyat al-manāzil fī al-makān wa-l-ʿaẓma min al-manzila*).[244] During ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, the anonymous author of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus* reasoned that the spirit from God directed towards (*alqāhā*) Mary in Q 4:171 was testimony that He came to dwell in her human essence (*aḥallahā fī al-dhāt al-bashariyya*).[245] The author also compares instances of God speaking to Moses through a burning bush (Q 20:12, 28:30, and 79:16) to God addressing humankind through Christ (*khāṭaba al-nās minhu*). He further supplies Q 3:55, Q 4:171, and Q 5:117 in support of the view that it was only the human nature, not the divine, that suffered and died on the Cross.[246]

[240] Īshōʿdād of Merv, *The Commentaries of Ishoʿdad of Merv: Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, ed. and trans. Margaret Dunlop Gibson and J. Rendel Harris, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 209–220 (text), 284 (trans.). For a summary of Theodore and Īshōʿdād's exegeses of Jn 20:17, see Accad, 'The Gospels in the Muslim and Christian Exegetical Discourse', 324–328 and 357–360.

[241] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 41. Cf. above regarding Bar Shennāyā's distinction between the indwelling of the prophets and the indwelling of Christ.

[242] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 140r.

[243] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 54–57.

[244] Elias bar Shennāyā, *Risālat al-ab Īliyya muṭrān Naṣībīn ilā al-wazīr al-kāmil Abī Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-wazīr al-Maghribī wa-jawāb risālihi*, in Nikolai Selezneyov, *Kitāb al-Majālis li-Mār Ilīyā muṭrān Naṣībīn wa-risālatuhu ilā al-wazīr al-Kāmil Abī al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghribī* (Moscow: Gryphon Press, 2017), 166–253, here 187. On the relationship between this letter and the *Majālis*, see Nicolai Selezneyov, 'Seven Sessions or Just a Letter? Observations on the Structure of the Disputations between Elias, Metropolitan of Nisibis, and the Vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī', *Scrinium* 14 (2018): 434–445.

[245] Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim–Christian Polemics*, 128 (text), 129 (trans.).

[246] Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim–Christian Polemics*, 124 (text). 125 (trans.). On Christological glosses to other Qur'ānic verses by Christian apologists, see Clare Wilde, 'Produce your Proof if you are Truthful (Q 2:111): The Qur'ān in Christian Arabic Texts (750–1258 C.E.)' (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, Washingtom, DC, 2011), 178–184.

Following the examples of earlier apologists, ʿAbdīshōʿ supplies several Johannine passages throughout his discussions of the Incarnation. However, only in his *Farāʾid* does he provide Qurʾānic proof-texts. He begins in his *Durra* by arguing that the *qunūm* of the Eternal Son is proven by statements spoken by Christ while in human form (*wa-huwa fī ṣūra ādamiyya*), namely Jn 14:9 ('I and my father are one') and Jn 8:58 ('before Abraham came into existence, I have been').[247] Furthermore, ʿAbdīshōʿ supplies instances from Christ's deeds that signify a union between the temporal and divine *qunūms*, though this time without citing specific verses:

> Firstly, his birth from a virgin without [need of] a husband. Secondly, his sinlessness (*tanazzuhuhu ʿan al-khaṭīʾa*) in mind, word, and deed. Thirdly, the manifestation of his signs on the mountain without submission or supplication, and his forgiveness of sins without [intercessory] prayer and rogation. Fifthly, his resurrection from the dead without needing any man to resurrect him (*min ghayr ḥāja ilā man yuqīmuhu min al-rijāl*). Sixthly, his eye-witnessed (*ʿiyānan*) ascension to heaven, seat of power and majesty.[248]

Similar proofs appear in Elias bar Shennāyā's exchanges with al-Maghribī, further revealing ʿAbdīshōʿ's indebtedness to a body of apologetics that had come down to him from previous centuries. In his letter to al-Maghribī, Bar Shennāyā responds to the vizier's insistence that Christ was no different from the prophets. Three aspects of this letter bear comparison with ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra*. The first addresses al-Maghribī's assertion that Christ's prophethood and subordinate status to God is proved by the fact that his miracles were no greater than those of Moses'. Elias responds that Moses was unable to perform miracles without offering supplication to God (*dūna suʾāl Allāh wa-ḍarāʿa ilayhi*), whereas Christ was able to do so on his own accord.[249] The second is al-Maghribī's claim that both Christ and Idrīs (here meant as the biblical Enoch) were raised to heaven. In reply, Bar Shennāyā argues that this statement about Idrīs contradicts the Qurʾān and the Bible, since neither explicitly state that he was raised to heaven, while Christ's ascension is clearly attested to in both the Bible and the Qurʾān, in the latter case by Q 3:55.[250] Third, Bar Shennāyā rejects al-Maghribī's claim that both the prophets and Christ were immaculate (*maʿṣūmīn*), because the Bible attests to the moral fallibility of the former and the impeccability of the latter.[251] While it is plausible that ʿAbdīshōʿ was influenced by Bar Shennāyā's reasoning, he makes no attempt to engage directly with Muslim challenges to biblical proofs for Christ's divinity. Instead, ʿAbdīshōʿ simply lists instances from the life of Christ that point to this divinity, without further discussion of how these might be interpreted differently.

[247] *Durra*, ch. 5, § 88. [248] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 91–93.
[249] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 184; cf. ibid., 48–49.
[250] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 185–6; cf. ibid., 50–51. [251] Bar Shennāyā, *Majālis*, 188.

In his *Farā'id*, ʿAbdīshōʿ marshals Jn 10:34 and Jn 10:36 in his defence of the Incarnation. Recall that earlier apologists such as Elias bar Shennāyā stressed that the term 'indwelling' was equivocal, encompassing as it does a semantic range that includes the indwelling of both the prophets and Christ. In the *Farā'id*, ʿAbdīshōʿ emphasizes a similar polyvalence in his apologetic interpretation of Jn 10:34 and Jn 10:36. Regarding the former—'Is it not written in your Law, "I have said you are gods"?'—ʿAbdīshōʿ offers four ways (*wujūh*) of understanding the word 'god': first is as the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūb*) and the Cause of all that exists (*ʿillat kull mawjūd*); second is according to each of His three Trinitarian attributes, the Pre-existing (*qadīm*), the Wise (*ḥakīm*), and the Living (*ḥayy*); third is as 'every exulted human being (*kull muʿaẓẓam min al-bashar*) upon whom the Word of God descended', in accordance with Ex 7:1 ('I have made you a God to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be your prophet'); and fourth is Christ who is considered perfect God by all Christians despite their differences.[252] In effect, our author presents a definition of God that accommodates several modes of divinity: God as Creator; God as triune being; the God Who indwells—but does not unite with—His prophets; and the God united with Christ's humanity. The argument that the word 'god' encompasses several meanings appears in an earlier apology, once again in Elias bar Shennāyā, this time in a letter to his brother, stating that the word 'lord' (*rabb*) can be used to describe the Creator, the head of a household, or the master of a slave—just as *ʿayn* applies to 'eye', 'spring', or 'essence'; or in the way that *saraṭān* might be said of a crab, the illness, or the zodiac of Cancer.[253]

ʿAbdīshōʿ then turns his attention to the latter verse—'Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy when I say that I am the son of God?'—and provides four ways of understanding the term 'son': first, as the Word of God; second, by baptism and faith; third, as an honorific bestowed upon a servant by a king, or regarding the honour (*sharaf*) which Jesus enjoyed as Son of God, inferred from Jn 20:17 ('I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God'); and fourth, by sexual intercourse (*jimāʿ*) and marriage.[254] Thus, by expounding a pluriform meaning of 'son', our author denies any contradiction in inferring Christ's divine sonship from scripture. Immediately following this fourfold definition of the word 'son', ʿAbdīshōʿ brings forward two Qur'ānic proof-texts in support of Christ's divinity:

> From the Qurʿān comes the statement that proves the first part [of the definition][255] concerning 'Christ': 'What is Jesus son of Mary but a spirit from

[252] *Farā'id*, §§ 42–45. [253] Bar Shennāyā, *Jawāb ʿan risālat akhīhī Zāhid al-ʿUlama'*, §§ 42–46.
[254] *Farā'id*, ch. 6, §§ 47–49.
[255] I.e., Christ as perfect God and Necessary Being (see above fourfold definition of Christ in the *Farā'id*).

> God and his Word which he cast into Mary?' (paraphrase of Q 4:171). In it [also] comes the statement that proves the necessity of the third definition[256] concerning Christ: 'O Jesus Son of Mary, verily I am taking you and raising you to Myself' (Q 3:55)—that is, to the highest power and honour. Since this humanity possesses perfection that is proper to none other than him, it is necessary that the Creator's dwelling in him and manifestation through him be of the utmost perfection possessed by no other. This is on account of His saying 'I am taking you and raising you to Myself'—not to heaven.[257]

ʿAbdīshōʿ's paraphrase of Q 4:171 suggests that it is not Muslims whom he intends to convince but a Christian audience who require assurance that the Incarnation could be justified through another faith's scripture. As we noted, earlier apologists seized on the fact that Jesus is referred to in the Qurʾān as the Word and Spirit of God. This makes it likely that ʿAbdīshōʿ's interpretation is not based on a fresh exegesis of the Q 4:171 but rather reflects this verse's continued use as a vindication Christ's divinity. In ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme, the Qurʾān also functions as a support for his Church's understanding of Christ's divinity from scripture. We have observed this in his citation of Q 3:55 to support the interpretation of Jn 20:17 that Christ was raised to an honour equal to God. Muslim scholars in our author's lifetime such as Ibn Taymiyya had become aware of such attempts by Christians to invoke Qurʾānic authority in support of their beliefs (as noted above, in Section 4.1). As Sydney Griffith has shown, earlier Christian apologists were aware that such Qurʾānic verses had an entirely different context among Muslims. But by taking these verses out of their 'original hermeneutical frame of reference', they could demonstrate to their co-religionists that the Qurʾān's text—at least on the face of it—advanced a Christian perspective.[258]

4.3.3 The Unifying Function of the Rational Soul

ʿAbdīshōʿ's rational arguments for the Incarnation centre on a distinction between the material and the immaterial in Christ. In emphasizing this distinction, he attempts to show how it is possible—and indeed necessary—that Christ the man united with the Word by means of the rational soul, without change entering the divine nature. The argument is of patristic origin, traceable to the writings of Gregory Nazianzen. Against Apollonarius, who held that Christ was born with a human body but a divine mind, Gregory insisted that the Incarnation occurred by way of Christ's mind, or rational soul, which contained the divine likeness but was nevertheless human. In doing so, Gregory advances the view that the Son of God

[256] I.e., that the Word dwelled in and united with Christ's humanity (see above fourfold definition of Christ in the *Farāʾid*).

[257] *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, §§ 53–56.

[258] Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 169.

saved humankind in complete identification with the Son of Man, the rational soul serving as a corollary between the two.[259]

Writing in the intellectual environment of tenth-century Baghdad, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī developed the Cappadocian's theory of the soul's unifying power by grounding it in a system of noetics. He does this in response to Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's question of why the Incarnation occurred through the hypostasis of the Son and not that of the Father or Holy Spirit. Ibn ʿAdī's solution was to argue that God united with Christ's humanity through the Sonship because of the similitude between His essence and the rational soul. Recall from the previous chapter that in his influential apology for the Trinity, Ibn ʿAdī invokes the principle that God, being devoid of matter, is capable of being intellect, intellecter, and intelligible of his own essence. Where the Incarnation is concerned, Ibn ʿAdī posits a similar isomorphism with regard to God's essence and man's rational soul:

> It is generally agreed that we know the Creator (may He be exalted) and are cognizant of Him (*ʿāqilūn lahu*). Since the knowledge of every knowable and cognizance of every intelligible is the knower's intellect acquiring the form of the knowable (*taṣawwur ʿaql al-ʿālim bi-ṣūrat al-maʿlūm*), then it follows that our intellects, upon our knowing the Creator (exalted be His name), acquire His form (*mutaṣawwaratan bi-ṣūratihi*). Because the Creator (exalted be His name) does not possess matter but rather His form is a part (*juzʿ*) of His essence, it is necessary that His form be the same as His essence. On that account, His essence is in our intellects. And because the intellect *in actu* (*bi-l-fiʿl*) and the intelligible *in actu* are one thing in a subject, [...] it is necessary that, when we are cognizant of the Creator (may He be exalted), our intellects are united (*muttaḥida*) with Him. It has therefore been explained [...] that the presence (*wujūd*) of the Creator (sanctified be His names) in our intellects through His essence is not impossible.[260]

Thus, on the principle that whatever is external to matter is capable of abstraction and intellection, Ibn ʿAdī argues that man can unite with God's essence through the form (*ṣūra*) of the rational soul, which, like the divine essence, is entirely abstract from its matter (*muʿarrāt min hayūlāhā*).[261] This, he concludes, was the means by which the union of the Word and Christ occured.[262] Like the Trinitarian argument

[259] This doctrine occurs in numerous places throughout Gregory's works, for example, *Orations* 2:23, 29:19, 38:13, and *Hymn* 1.1.10.56–61, cited in Andrew Hofer, *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114–117; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 297; Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 311. Although the subject of Jesus's rational soul was first discussed by Origen, it was Gregory's treatment of the subject that would prove the more authoritative among later Christian writers.

[260] Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 74–75. This passage is discussed and summarized by al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl in Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Qawl ʿalā wujūb al-taʾannus*, ch. 23 § 13 and Platti, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe*, 129.

[261] Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 80.

[262] Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqālāt*, 83. However, in line with other Christian apologists, Ibn ʿAdī stresses that the union was specific to Christ, since none of the prophets manifested miracles from the moment of their

for divine unity from self-intellection, Ibn ʿAdī's Christological theory would subsequently become another *communis opinio* among Arabic-speaking Christian thinkers of all stripes. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī employs it to explain why the Incarnation occurred through the Sonship of the Trinity at the exclusion of the Father and Holy Spirit. The answer, according to Iṣfahānī, is that the hypostasis of the Son is equal to God's knowledge; and since all knowledge possesses a concomitance (*talāzum*) with its object of knowledge, the union of natures must have occurred through the Sonship.[263] In the first half of the thirteenth century, al-Būshī reasons that the righteousness of life (*birr al-ḥayāt*) was passed from God to Christ on the basis of the body with which He united via the rational soul (*al-nafs al-ʿaqliyya*).[264] While this unification argument occurs more commonly in Christian Arabic apologetics, it was not wholly uncommon in Syriac texts. In his *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*, Barhebraeus lists the objections of those who deny the possibility (*meṯmasyānūṯā*) of the Incarnation. Among them is the objection that, were the union between the eternal Word and the humanity possible, the former would be limited (*'estayyaḵ*) by the latter's corporeity and finitude, which is absurd for an incorporeal, infinite being.[265] The maphrian counters by explaining the rational soul's intermediary function during the Incarnation. Since the soul is unaffected by its attachment to a finite body in a physical substrate (*'aṯrā*), its unification with the Word is possible without corruption entering into God's essence.[266]

ʿAbdīshōʿ expounds much the same principle in his *Durra* in which he adduces demonstrative proofs (*dalā'il burhāniyya*) for the Incarnation. He begins from a 'natural philosophical perspective' (*al-naẓar al-falsafī al-ṭabīʿī*): that the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) is eternal and does not perish upon the death of the human form, unlike animal, mineral, vegetal, and elemental souls. If, then, the rational soul possesses an affinity (*munāsaba*) with something, then its conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with its like (*al-munāsib bi-munāsibihi*) is a matter of necessity. Moreover, ʿAbdīshōʿ reasons that Adam's likeness (*mithāl*) to God could not have been in his body, which is susceptible to accidents and division (*qābil li-l-ʿawāriḍ wa-l-inqisām*). Rather, humankind's resemblance (*mushābaha*) to the divine nature must reside in the rational soul, which, like the divine nature, is infinite (*ghayr maḥṣūra*).[267]

A connected strategy emerges in ʿAbdīshōʿ's other works, though this time involving the analogy of light and its effect on reflective substances. Recall that in his *Farā'id* he describes a union of 'illumination and effect' (*ishrāq wa-ta'thīr*),

birth and to the same degree. Moreover, Ibn ʿAdī defines uniting as two things becoming one without separation of their parts. Since Christians understand the Incarnation to be eternal and inseparable, they ascribe union solely to Christ; ibid 84–85.

[263] Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Epître sur l'unité et la trinité*, 29 (trans.), 51 (text).

[264] Al-Būshī, *Traité de Paul de Būš*, §§ 155–157.

[265] Barhebraeus, *Candélabre: Quatrième Base*, 24 (text), 25 (trans.).

[266] Barhebraeus, *Candélabre: Quatrième Base*, 28 (text), 29 (trans.).

[267] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 101–104.

stating that the source of illumination is unaffected by the substance upon which its light is acted. It is in his *Pearl*, however, that we first encounter the principle in detail. Here, our author gives the following explanation of how it was possible for the divine nature to subsist in Christ's created body:

> The divine nature illuminated the human nature by conjunction (*b-naqqīpūṯā*), like a precious, pure pearl (*margānīṯā rēšāytā wa-ḏkīṯā*) that is illuminated by the light of the sun shining upon it, just as the nature of the illuminated becomes like the nature of the illuminator, [or how] sight is affected by the rays from the receptive nature as much as the agent nature, without change entering into the agent through the passibility of what is affected (*metta'bḏānūṯ ḥāšōšā*).[268]

Thus, we see why ʿAbdīshōʿ deemed Ibn ʿAbbād's poetic expression about the opacity of wine and glass (discussed in Section 4.2.3) was so well suited to the mystery of the Incarnation: both it and the analogy of the precious pearl neatly illustrate how God's divine nature remained unchanged when united with Christ's humanity. The analogy of the precious jewel or pearl also finds expression in the Arabic of the *Durra* and *Farāʾid*, though this time featuring the rational soul as the principal conductor of the two natures' union. Both works state that the Incarnation occurred through the rational faculty (*quwwa nāṭiqa*) in Christ's person. Accordingly, the divine nature illuminated Christ's intellect (*ʿaql*), which was lit up like a clear-coloured jewel in the light of the sun.[269] In the same manner as the *Pearl*, *Durra, Farāʾid*, and *Khuṭba* state that the union of light and substance results in the receiving nature becoming identical to the active nature (*ṣāra ṭabʿ al-qābil huwa ṭabʿ al-fāʿil*), and so the acts emanating from the receiving essence do so also from the active essence (*fa-ṣadara al-fiʿl ʿan al-dhāt al-qābila ṣudūrahā ʿan al-dhāt al-fāʿila*).[270] The *Durra* employs this analogy to demonstrate how God's actions were worked through the intermediary (*bi-wāsiṭa*) of Christ's rational soul[271]—or, as the *Khuṭba* puts it, the 'rational pearl' (*al-durra al-nāṭiqa*).[272] By establishing the soul as the locus of union, ʿAbdīshōʿ affirms an established Diophysite position: that the humanity and divinity were bound to Christ in two natures, each with distinct operational functions—which is to say, he performed miracles through his immutable divinity and suffered on the Cross through his perfect humanity.[273]

A further demonstration for the possibility of the Incarnation appears in relation to ʿAbdīshōʿ's Trinitarian thought, outlined and discussed in the previous

[268] *Pearl*, 18.

[269] With only a slight difference in verbiage: *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 141–142: *fa-stanārat ka-mā tastanīru al-jawhara al-shaffāfa bi-ḍawʾ al-shams*; *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, § 30: *fa-stanāra ka-mā tastanīru al-jawhara al-ṣāfiya bi-ishrāq nūr al-shams ʿalayhā*.

[270] *Durra*, ch. 5, § 144; *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, § 31; *Khuṭba*, § 18.

[271] *Durra*, ch. 5, § 145.

[272] *Khuṭba*, § 17.

[273] *Durra* ch. 5, §§ 71–73; *Farāʾid*, ch. 6, § 38.

chapter. This involves the conjunction and union of the Intellecter (ʿ*āqil*), one of God's three essential attributes, with an intelligible (*maʿqūl*). ʿAbdīshōʿ reasons as follows:

> It is not possible for [Christ] the man to be an abstract intellect (ʿ*aqlan mujarradan*), nor can he be an abstract intelligible (*maʿqūlan mujarradan*). But he can be a disembodied intellecter (ʿ*āqilan mujarradan*) [due to his possessing a rational soul]. On account of that possibility, he conjoins (*muttaṣilan*) to one of the three hypostases, that is, the Intellecter (ʿ*āqil*), the trait (*maʿnā*) of the Son, while the pre-existent substance conjoins to the man.[274]

In other words, the Intellecter—which, in the traditional Christian Arabic Trinitarian scheme is equal to the Son—conjoins with the human nature via the rational soul to produce the incarnate Christ. As we observed in the previous chapter, a similar argument was first used by Christian Aristotelians like Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī to prove God's triune nature from the premise that He is identical to what He intellects. But whereas in the Trinitarian context the doctrine pertains to God's self-knowledge, the theory outlined above addresses the unity of God's intellect with intelligibles other than Himself—in this case, the human intellect or soul.

The most forceful and influential critic of such unificationist theories was Avicenna. Although he regarded divine self-intellection as a valid means of establishing God's essential unity, he rejected outright the possibility that the active intellect could unite with existents external to it—a view he ascribed to Porphyry of Tyre and a group of thinkers he refers to as 'emanationists' (*mutaṣaddirūn*).[275] At the heart of Avicenna's denial is the idea that the soul grasps forms from the active intellect but does not become identical to them. As such, he viewed intellection as contact (*ittiṣāl*) rather than union (*ittiḥād*) with the active intellect, whereby the human soul grasps forms but does not become identical to them.[276] In addition to this distinction, Avicenna held that an intellect cannot unite with anything without undergoing change (*istiḥāla*) or generation

[274] *Durra*, ch. 5, §§ 181–182.

[275] John Finnegan, 'Avicenna's Refutation of Porphyrius', in *Avicenna Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta: n.p., 1956), 187–203, here 197. When Avicennan spoke of the 'Porphyrians', he probably had in mind a treatise attributed to Porphyry entitled *Fī al-nafs* (*De Anima*). Here, the author states that when the human intellect is in the non-material realm, it becomes one with the First intellect; Ps.-Porphyry, *Maqāla Fūrfūrīyūs fī al-nafs*, in Wilhelm Kutsch, 'Ein arabisches Bruchstilck aus Porphyrios (?) *Peri Psychês*', *Melanges de l'Universite St. Joseph* 31 (1954): 265–286, here 268 (text), 270–271 (trans.).

[276] See, for example, Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *Commentaire sur le livre Lambda de la Métaphysique d'Aristote (chapitres 6–10) = Sharḥ maqālat al-Lām (faṣl 6–10) min Kitāb mā baʿda al-ṭabīʿah li-Arisṭūṭālīs (min Kitāb al-Inṣāf)*, ed. and tr. Marc Geoffroy et al (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2014), 59 (text), 58 (trans.). Whereas Nestorian Christians understood the term *ittiṣāl* ('conjunction') to be a form of uniting, Avicenna understood it as simply 'contact' or 'touching'

and corruption (*al-kawn wa-l-fasād*). Accordingly, the coming together of two things leads to three possibilities: (i) the existence of one thing and the non-existence of another; (ii) the non-existence of both and the creation of a *tertium quid*; (iii) or the remainder of both, resulting in two, not one.[277] Where noetics are concerned, this precludes intelligibles from taking on the identity of an intellect. As such, Avicenna perceived unificationists to be utterers of 'an inconceivable poetic statement' (*qawl shiʿrī ghayr maʿqūl*), a reference to the ecstatic sayings of theosophist Sufis.[278]

By the thirteenth century, Muslim and Jewish theologians had adopted aspects of Avicenna's critique of unificationism in order to refute Christian doctrines. As we observed above in Section 4.1, al-Rāzī and Ibn Kammūna each argued that the divine and human natures in Christ could not have united in any real way, since this would result in some form of generation and corruption. Yet despite such protestations, Christian apologists remained committed to the idea that Christ's rational soul was the means by which his humanity united with the Word. The theory's persistence, therefore, suggests it was co-religionists that Christian theologians sought to convince. This is none more evident than in a treatise by the Copto-Arabic author al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl's response to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Avicennan critique of indwelling and union. In line with what we have already observed in other writers, al-Ṣafī affirms the principle that the intellect is identical to its object, with the caveat that the intelligible does not require the intellect, such as when we, as contingent beings, are cognizant of God or the celestial spheres.[279] In other words, God is self-subsistent irrespective of His being an object of intellection by other beings. As such, the uniting of the rational soul with the divine essence cannot admit change in God. A further example of this strategy emerges in Barhebraeus's *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries*. In addition to making the same argument based on the intermediary function of the soul, he also addresses an unnamed critic who deploys Avicenna's argument that the coming together of two things cannot occur without either one or both remaining,

between two things without their becoming one; see Dimitri Gutas, 'Ibn Sina [Avicenna]', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2016 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed 12 December 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ibn-sina/, no. 7.

[277] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabīʿiyyāt al-shifāʾ: Fī al-nafs*, in Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text): Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifāʾ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 239–240; idem, *Najāt*, 205; idem, *Ishārāt, namaṭ* 7, *faṣl* 7 and 11. For an overview of Avicenna's rejection of the unification argument, see also Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), 15–16; İbrahim Kalın, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46–59.

[278] Ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabīʿiyyāt al-shifāʾ*, 240; *Ishārāt, namaṭ* 7, *faṣl* 11. In his commentary on this passage, al-Ṭūsī (ibid.) notes that it is a poetic statement 'because it is imagined, and on account of its imagining, the uneducated theosophists and Sufis (*al-ʿawāmm al-mutaʾalliha wa-l-mutaṣawwifa*) suppose it to be true'.

[279] Al-Ṣafī, *al-Shukūk al-wārida min al-imām Fākhr al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb (raḥimahu Allāh) ʿalā al-ittiḥād wa-jawāb al-akh al-fāḍil al-Ṣafī (raḥimahu Allāh) ʿanhu*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 40, § 14.

ceasing to exist, or generating a *tertium quid*. Barhebraeus responds that two things that share a mutual affinity (*puḥḥāmhōn [ʾ]ḥyānāyā*) can indeed unite without change to their essences, the locus of this mutual affinity being the rational soul.[280] Thus, like ʿAbdīshōʿ, Christian apologists in the thirteenth century were obliged to fall back on the same pre-Avicennan philosophical arguments about the rational soul's unifying power—arguments that had little hope of being accepted by certain Muslim critics but were intended to clarify an established Christian dogma concerning the Incarnation. This doctrine was originated by the Greek Fathers and further evolved in conversation with Muslim interlocutors who wished to know whether the Incarnation could be supported by reason. It is no surprise, then, that the theory occurs throughout ʿAbdīshōʿ's Syriac and Arabic works. Its persistence reveals the important didactic function such strategies had in the exposition of Christological doctrine.

Conclusions

The foregoing has shown that much of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology was informed by a need to defend key aspects of dogma surrounding the Incarnation. However, these apologetic concerns do not inform his entire Christology. In Section 4.2.1 we observed that a proportion of the *Pearl* is devoted to the memory of the church councils and the impact of these events on the emergence of various churches, including those with which the Church of the East had been brought into contact under Mongol rule. Here, ʿAbdīshōʿ's tone is overtly polemical, directed as it is towards other Christian confessions (namely the Miaphysite and Chalcedonian churches), with historical narrative featuring prominantly in his expository method. Our author's Arabic *Profession* is similarly directed against rival Christian confessions, though this time through language inherited from earlier authors who sought to demonstrate how Nestorian Christology was more palatable to Muslim critiques than its Jacobite and Melkite counterparts. Thus, the *Profession* reveals just how closely entwined inter-religious apologetics had become with intra-religious polemic. Yet we have also observed the dynamic nature of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology. From 1302/3, the year he wrote his *Durra*, the greater part of his writings on the Incarnation was more concerned with defending the doctrine against external attacks than refuting other Christian confessions.

There is little to suggest from our authors' writings that his apologetics arose as a direct response to specific contemporary criticisms. Rather, a considerable portion of ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christology is indebted to the apologetics of earlier authorities whose ideas were forged in response to Islam. Whereas Elias Bar Shennāyā's

[280] Barhebraeus, *Candélabre: Quatrième Base*, 20, 22 (text); 21, 23 (trans.).

arguments emerged from discussions with Abū al-Qāsim al-Maghrībī, ʿAbdīshōʿ expresses those same arguments in systematic and encyclopaedic texts, thus demonstrating how the inter-religious controversy of earlier centuries shaped the internal articulation of later dogma. The impact of these pre-Mongol Christian Arabic apologists is evident from their enduring importance in the theological canon of Christians living in the later Islamicate world. During these earlier theological confrontations with Islam, key patristic doctrines underwent an adaptive process of resemanticization. In the Christological context, we have observed how Theodore of Mopsuestia's language of union informed Elias bar Shennāyā's explanation of the Incarnation. Meanwhile, Gregory of Nazianzus's doctrine of the soul's unifying faculty was further developed by Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī to explain to Muslim critics how the Incarnation was possible. By the thirteenth century, Ibn ʿAdī's Christological theory had become a commonplace across various denominations, as noted in ʿAbdīshōʿ and others. The persistence of these theories attests to the importance of apologetics in the systematisation of Christian doctrine under Muslim rule.

We have also observed from ʿAbdīshōʿ's parabolic and analogical method that the language of his apologetics was by no means static. This is suggested by his appeals to a shared Arabic literary tradition. Such language, whether inspired by Arabic poetry or the Bilawhar and Būdhāsaf legend, represents a further instance of a theological *koinē* among Muslims and Christians. For the latter, this *koinē* provided renewed meaning to late antique doctrines, from Antiochene understandings of indwelling and uniting to arguments about divine deception. The same can be said of ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of certain *kalam*-inflected expressions in which he grounds long-established opinions about the providential nature of the Incarnation. To be sure, such motifs and expressions differed in meaning and context between their Christian and Muslim usages. Nevertheless, their occurrence in Christian theological compendia attest to the impact of the Arabic language on the theological praxis of Christians in the Islamicate world. While ʿAbdīshōʿ's explanations of Christology could hope for little acceptance among Muslim polemicists, they at least sought to assure a Christian readership that their beliefs could be reasonably articulated. Indeed, the *Pearl*'s success as a key work of dogma in later centuries indicates just how effective ʿAbdīshōʿ's Christological didacticism proved to be.

5

Christian Practices, Islamic Contexts

Discourses on the Cross and Clapper

Having touched on two central apologetic themes, we now turn our attention to ʿAbdīshōʿ's defence of Christian ritual. Of these 'secondary topics' (so defined in Chapter 1, Section 1.8), my focus here is limited to the veneration of the Cross and the call to prayer. As Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have observed, religious communities in the medieval Mediterranean world often communicated boundaries and differentiation through various 'lines of sound and sight', living alongside one another in what might be termed a 'visual and acoustic environment'.[1] In the case of Christian communities living in close proximity to Muslims, such differences could be expressed through religious paraphernalia and the sounds emanating from places of worship.[2] As such, these distinctions were well known to Muslim observers and critics. And when Christian practice came under intellectual or physical attack,[3] apologists like ʿAbdīshōʿ were often moved to justify them.[4]

As noted earlier, ritual practice formed what ʿAbdīshōʿ calls 'practical' (*ʿamaliyya*) rather than 'theoretical' (*ʿilmiyya*) matters.[5] Although treated similarly in other systematic theologies, such issues could nevertheless lie at the theoretical core of Christian doctrine. Where the veneration of the Cross was concerned, Christian theologians by ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime had developed what Mark Swanson

[1] Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 124–125 and 421–422. The term 'acoustic landscape' is also employed by Olivia Remie Contsable, 'Regulating Religious Noise: The Council of Vienne, the Mosque Call and Muslim Pilgrimage in the Late Medieval Mediterranean World', *Medieval Encounters* 16, no. 1 (2010): 64–95, here 65, whose work I discuss below.

[2] See Holden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 421–422 for a brief discussion about issues of visibility and audibility in shared religious landscapes across the medieval Mediterranean world, namely pilgrimage sites and the sounds of the 'bell, the *semantron* and the muezzin'.

[3] In Chapter 2, we observed that Muslim attacks on Christian buildings and the imposition of social restrictions, namely the paying of the *jizya* and the wearing of the *zunnār*, had taken place in ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, most acutely during the Ilkhan Ghāzān's turbulent rise to power in 1295.

[4] See Landron, *Attitudes nestoriennes*, ch. 15 for discussions between Christians and Muslims about circumcision, ablution (*wuḍūʾ*), prayer, veneration of the Cross, the adoration of images, and the wearing of the girdle (*zunnār*) as a mark of chastity and obedience. See also Khoury, *Matériaux*, 6/2:59–100, which surveys Christian–Muslim discussions about ablution (*wuḍūʾ*), prayer, fasting, alms, pilgrimage, the Sacraments (*asrār*), baptism, the Eucharist (*qurbān*), penitence, and the priesthood (*kahanūt*).

[5] See discussion in Chapter 1, Section 1.8.

Christian Thought in the Medieval Islamicate World: ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition. Salam Rassi, Oxford University Press. © Salam Rassi 2022. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192846761.003.0006

has referred to as a 'comprehensive body of apologetics'.[6] From the early Abbasid period onwards, they contended with a number of principal challenges. First came the challenge from Muslim polemicists who advanced Q 4:157 to argue that the Jews neither killed nor crucified Jesus, but that 'it appeared so to them' (*shubbiha lahum*). This prompted Christian apologists to defend the facticity of Christ's death.[7] This issue, however, is chiefly dealt with by ʿAbdīshōʿ in sections of his works discussing the truthfulness of the Gospels' testimony,[8] and so will not be addressed in this chapter. Receiving greater focus here are ʿAbdīshōʿ's arguments for the soteriology of the Cross against opposition to the claim that humankind's salvation was worked by Christ's death. This chapter will also address how ʿAbdīshōʿ, in line with earlier apologists, defended the veneration of the Cross by rejecting accusations of *shirk*. In doing so we will see how Christological concerns such as God's transcendence and the function of Christ's human and divine natures (addressed in the previous chapter) were inextricably linked to the issue of the Cross and its role in worship.

As in other areas of doctrine explored in this study, we must consider ʿAbdīshōʿ's defence of Christian cult as part of a broader didactic effort. In the centuries leading up to his lifetime, Christian theologians in the Islamicate world strove to reassure co-religionists that veneration of the Cross could be supported by both reason and revelation, often by appealing to a theological common ground. As we have observed elsewhere in this study, these apologetic strategies would undergo a process of systematization and rearticulation in encyclopaedic works of dogma. This is not to say that the theology of the Cross had achieved a final fixity by the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Rather, by building on previous arguments in defence of the Cross's role in worship, ʿAbdīshōʿ develops, fine-tunes, and enriches an ever-expanding body of apologetics.

In addition to appealing to a shared rationality, it was necessary for apologists to affirm the Church's own sacred traditions that underpinned religious practice, as these too were well-known to Muslim critics. This chapter will discuss ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of two traditions: (i) the apostles' purported role in instituting

[6] Mark N. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Christian Apologies', in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 155–145, here 144. Elsewhere, Swanson brings together no less than fourteen Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian responses to Muslim antagonisms to the Cross from the eighth to tenth centuries, and a further five of uncertain dates. Idem, 'Folly to the *ḥunafāʾ*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian–Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D'. (PhD diss., The Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, 1992), 2–49.

[7] For medieval Muslim interpretations of Q 4:157 and their impact on Christian–Muslim discussions, see Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: the Representation of Jesus in the Qurʾān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 106–141, idem, 'Crucifixion', *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* 4 (2001): 487–489.

[8] See *Pearl*, ch. 3, part 3; *Durra*, ch. 1; *Farāʾid*, ch. 1.

the Cross in the performance of Church rites,[9] and (ii) the legend of the emperor Constantine's vision and the subsequent discovery of the True Cross by Helena, his mother (two different but closely intertwined narratives). The latter can be summarized as follows: prior to a battle with an enemy army, the emperor sees a sign in the sky reading 'In this sign you will conquer', presaging his victory and conversion to Christianity. Shortly thereafter, his believing mother Helena travels to Jerusalem to discover the whereabouts of the True Cross. After threatening a Jewish scholar named Judas with torture, its location is revealed to lie beneath a well. Finding three crosses (one of Christ and two of the thieves crucified with him), Helena places each on the body of a dead man. Upon the third attempt, the man is revived and the True Cross established.[10] In common with earlier Syriac and Arabic Christian writers, ʿAbdīshōʿ weaves such sacred traditions together with arguments designed to vindicate the practice of venerating the Cross. In doing so, he seeks to convince a Christian readership that such practices were wholly defensible in light of Muslim criticisms. The controversial tone of his writings on these topics (observed elsewhere in this study) is crucial to our understanding of how apologetics had become inextricably linked with the Church of the East's catechetical enterprise by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

The defence of sacred traditions surrounding the Cross is fairly common in medieval Syriac and Christian Arabic apologetics. The call to prayer, on the other hand, features far less, occurring more often in liturgical works (as will be discussed below in Section 5.3.1). ʿAbdīshōʿ's discussion of a wooden percussion instrument known as the clapper[11] centres on a tradition originating in a cycle of Old Testament apocrypha and exegetical traditions known as the *The Cave of Treasures* (*Mʿarraṯ gazzē*), first composed in Syriac between the sixth and early seventh centuries.[12] In its retelling of the Flood narrative, God commands Noah to construct a clapper (*nāqōšā*) made from boxwood that does not rot (*qaysā*

[9] The tradition that the Apostles instituted the Cross in liturgical and sacramental practice is contained in the Pseudo-Apostolic canons. For these in the East Syrian tradition, see Kaufhold, 'La Litérature Pseudo-Canonique Syriaque', 158–164.

[10] For the Syriac version of these narratives, see edition and translation by Han J.W. Drijvers and Jan Willem Drijvers (ed. and tr.), *The Finding of the True Cross: The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac*, CSCO 565 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997). On their sources and historical development, see Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), esp. 95–194. The legend is also preserved in many Christian Arabic versions. For East Syrian examples, see Addai Scher (ed. and tr.), *Histoire nestorienne inédite (Chronique de Séert). Première partie*, Patrologia Orientalis 4, fasc. 3 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1908), 263–276 and Haddad, *Mukhṭaṣar al-akhbār al-bīʿiyya*, 33–34.

[11] See below in this section for a more precise definition of this term and its usage in pre-modern Syriac and Arabic texts.

[12] The work was generally thought to have been composed between the fifth and sixth centuries (Clemens Leonhard, 'Cave of Treasures', *GEDSH*, 90–91), though a late sixth–early seventh-century composition has been recently (and convincingly) postulated by Sergey Minov, *Memory and Identity in the Syriac* Cave of Treasures*: Rewriting the Bible in Sasanian Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 36–48. Arabic versions of the *Cave of Treasures* will be discussed below, in Sections 5.1 and 5.3.1.

d-ʾeškārʿā d-lā mballaṭ), three cubits long and one and a half cubits wide, to be struck three times a day with a mallet (*ʾarzapṭā*): once in the morning to gather the builders; once at midday to break for lunch; and once at dusk to send them home.[13]

It is unsurprising to find a discussion of the church clapper in ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetic oeuvre. As the preserve of Christians in the Islamicate world, it could not hope to enjoy the same socio-cultural and religious status as the mosque call (*adhān*)—a practice grounded in prophetic tradition.[14] In an article on the regulation of the Muslim call to prayer by the Christian rulers of Aragon after the Council of Vienne in 1309, Olivia Remie Constable showed that the acoustic environment shared by Christians and Muslims in medieval Spain was often contentious. For 'concerns expressed by both Muslims and Christians about the religious noise and public rituals of minority communities (whether the mosque call, the ringing of bells, or local pilgrimage) demonstrate inter-religious tensions in the Mediterranean world at the turn of the fourteenth century'.[15] While the religious acoustic landscape of ʿAbdīshōʿ's time was no less contentious, it can also be said that Muslims and Christians shared what has already been referred to here as a 'literary space'. In addition to expounding his own Church's teaching on the use of the clapper in times of prayer and liturgy, our author makes a direct appeal to Islamic tradition in an attempt to commend the use of the clapper in a socio-cultural environment that could sometimes be hostile to it.

Before proceeding, I believe it necessary to qualify my rendering of the terms *nāqōšā* and *nāqūs* as 'clapper', since its meaning in Syriac and Arabic sources is not altogether obvious. Although often defined as 'bell' in modern Arabic,[16] the word *nāqūs* (derived from the Syriac *nāqōšā*) is more appropriately defined in pre-modern times as a wooden—and less frequently, brass—sounding

[13] For this narrative as it occurs in East and West Syrian recensions (published *en face*), see anonymous, *Les caverne des trésors*, ed. and tr. Su-min Ri, CSCO 486–487 (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), ch. 14, §§ 11–13.

[14] According to a number of important *ḥadīths*, Muḥammad is said to have deliberated with his companions about the best method of announcing the hour of prayer to the faithful. Some proposed a fire be lit, others that a horn be blown (in the manner of the Jews), and others still that a clapper be struck. After ʿAbdallāh ibn Zayd related a dream in which he had seen someone announcing the prayer from atop a mosque, it was agreed that the *adhān*, performed by Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, would be used for this purpose; G.H.A. Juynboll, 'Adhān', *EI²* (1986): 188–188; idem, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 58, 222, 421.

[15] Constable, 'Regulating Religious Noise', 64. For further examples of inter-religious conflict over contested modes of prayer call in late Islamic and Reconquista Spain, see Ali Asgar Alibhai, 'The Reverberations of Santiago's Bells in Reconquista Spain', *La Corónica* 36, no. 2 (2008): 145–165 and Michelle E. Garceau, '"I call the people." Church bells in Fourteenth-Century Catalunya', *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011): 197–214.

[16] For modern meanings, see, for example, Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Arabic-English)*, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1994) 1162; Martin Hinds and El Said Badawi, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic. Arabic-English* (Beirut: Librairie de Liban, 1986), 880.

board, struck with a mallet by priests and monks in times of prayer and liturgy,[17] synonymous with the Greek semantron.[18] Its use is attested as early as the sixth century,[19] and persisted among Christian communities living under Islam throughout the Middle Ages.[20] Other forms of *nāqūs* include a type of wooden castanet, third- to sixth-century examples of which have been uncovered at Egyptian monasteries in Saqqāra and Fayyūm.[21] The wooden manufacture of the instrument is hinted at in the Syriac lexicon of Ḥasan bar Bahlūl (fl. tenth century), who defines *nāqōšā* as a representation (*ṭūpsā*) of the Cross (*zqīpā*).[22] We also encounter a Cross–clapper typology in an Arabic disputation between a Coptic patriarch named John and a Melkite.[23]

The clapper would gradually be replaced by the church bell, a Latin Christian innovation thought to have been introduced into Eastern Christendom by the Crusaders, though this process has not been well documented.[24] While bells were earlier adopted by Mozarabic Christians in al-Andalus,[25] by the turn of the

[17] For basic definitions of *nāqūs*, as well as references to the word's Syriac etymology, see Georg Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini* (Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1954), 110 and Frants Buhl, 'Nāḳūs', *EI*[2] 7 (1993): 943.

[18] For its use today in Mt Athos and other Eastern Orthodox monasteries, see Dimitri Conomos, 'Semandron', in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 559.

[19] An early instance in Syriac sources occurs in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* written in the 560s by John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. and tr. E.W. Brooks, Patrologia Orientalis, 17, fasc.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1923), 254.

[20] For early Byzantine Greek sources, particularly hagiographies, which mention *semantra*, see Edmund Venables, 'Semantron, or Semanterion', in *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, ed. William Smith and Samuel Cheetham, 2 vols. (Hartford: J.B. Burr, 1875–1880), 2:1879.

[21] Ragheb Moftah, Marian Robertson, and Martha Ray, 'Music, Coptic: Musical Instruments', in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz Suryal Atiya, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 6:1738–1740, here 1739.

[22] Ḥasan bar Bahlūl, *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano bar Bahlule e pluribus codicibus edidit et notulis instruxit*, ed. Rubens Duval, 2 vols. (Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1888–1901), 2: 1272. The Syriac-Arabic glossary of Īshōʿ bar ʿAlī simply gives us the definition of 'that which is [found] in monasteries' (*alladhī fī al-diyārāt*); Īshōʿ bar ʿAlī, *The Syriac-Arabic Glosses of Īshōʿ bar ʿAlī, Part II*, ed. Richard J.H. Gottheil (Rome: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1908–1928), 92.

[23] Stephen J. Davis et al. (ed. and tr.), *A Disputation over a Fragment of the Cross: A Medieval Arabic Text from the History of Christian–Jewish–Muslim Relations in Egypt* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 2012), § 36.

[24] Precious few studies have examined the gradual disappearance of clappers in churches in the Middle East and their replacement by bells. One attempt has been made by Ḥabīb Zayyāt, *al-Dīyārāt al-naṣrāniyya fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938), 98–99. Here Zayyāt asserts that bells must have been introduced to the Middle East no earlier than the Crusades, though this is speculative in the absence of more documentary and material evidence. Zayyāt does, however, provide evidence from late-medieval and early modern European travel accounts which attest to the persistence of clappers and the rarity of bells among Christian communities in Mount Lebanon and Egypt as late as the seventeenth century (ibid., 99).

[25] As might be suggested by Eulogius of Cordoba (d. 859), who describes Muslim attitudes to the Christian call to prayer in the following way: 'As soon as they hear the sound of clanging metal in their ears, as if beguiled by a false superstition, they begin to exercise their tongues in all kinds of swearing and foulness.' Eulogius of Cordoba, *The Martyrs of Cordoba (850–859)*, tr. Edward P. Colbert (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 256–257, cited in John H. Arnold and Caroline Goodson, 'Resounding Community: The History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells', *Viator* 43, no. 1 (2012): 99–130, here 113.

fourteenth century Christian communities in the eastern Mediterranean were still known by their Muslim neighbours to employ clappers. The Arabic lexicographer Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311/12), for instance, defines *nāqūs* as the 'striking board (*miḍrāb*) of the Christians, which they strike in times of prayer', further elaborating that it is comprised of a long piece of wood (*khashaba ṭawīla*) and a short wooden mallet (*wabīla qaṣīra*)[26]—though his definitions can be conservative and prescriptive, relying as they do on earlier sources.[27] Nevertheless, it would appear that the *nāqūs* continued to be known as a wooden percussion instrument used by Christians in eastern Islamicate lands until the introduction of the bell, as suggested in a secretarial manual by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418), who reports that, 'When they (*scil.* the Christians) wish to pray, they strike a clapper, which is a rectangular piece of wood (*khashaba mustaṭīla*).'[28]

5.1 Some Muslim Representations of Christian Practices

Having outlined some of the main traditions surrounding the veneration of the Cross and the sounding of the clapper, and having attempted some basic definitions, we can now examine Muslim attitudes to Christian practice. It would be impossible to attempt an exhaustive treatment of these often complex and dynamic representations, for to do so would risk presenting a generalized picture. Instead, I wish to identify some salient legislative, literary, and theological manifestations of these attitudes that might have resonated in ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime.

Christian practices were of interest to Islamic jurists, particularly in relation to the status of 'protected peoples' (*ahl al-dhimma*) under Islamic law, mainly defined as Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians.[29] The formulation of the *dhimma* took place within the framework of the 'Pact of 'Umar', so called because of its association with the caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644).[30] Of concern to us here are two of its provisions: that Christians refrain from publicly displaying the Cross in plain sight of Muslims, especially during feast days,[31] and that the church clapper be struck softly, so as not to offend neighbouring Muslims.[32] These

[26] Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 20 vols. (Cairo: al-Ṭabʿa al-Kubrā al-Miṣriyya, 1300–1308/1882–1891), 8:126.

[27] Ibn Manẓūr's definition is reliant on the lexicographer Abū Manṣūr ibn Aḥmad al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, ed. ʿUmar Salāmī and ʿAbd al-Karīm Ḥāmid,15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2001), 12:312.

[28] Quoted in Zayyāt, *al-Dīyārāt al-naṣrāniyya*, 90.

[29] For a basic definition, see Claude Cahen, 'Dhimma', *EI²* 2 (1965): 227–231.

[30] For a useful conspectus of the various versions of the text, see Mark R. Cohen, 'What is the Pact of ʿUmar? A Literary Historical Study', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999): 100–157.

[31] Ḥabīb Zayyāt, *Simāt al-naṣārā wa-l-yahūd fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1950), 18–25.

[32] Arthur Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of ʿUmar* (London: Cass, 1970), 100ff; Zayyāt, *al-Diyārāt al-naṣrāniyya*, 88–90, 90–98; Fr. Buhl, 'Nāqūs'.

stipulations would receive their most systematic and comprehensive treatment in the *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma* ('Codes of Conduct for the Protected People') of the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), who provides three versions of the Pact of ʿUmar with commentary on each.[33] Here, he takes a somewhat rigorist view of the Pact's prescribed restrictions on *dhimmīs*. Concerning the use of the church clapper, for example, he rules that it should be sounded only within the confines of the church, thereby banishing its presence from the public soundscape altogether.[34] The Pact also featured in the regulatory discourses of the *muḥtasibs*, market overseers whose remit could often include the enforcement of social restrictions on non-Muslims.[35] The *ḥisba* manuals of al-Shayzarī (d. 1193) and Ibn Ukhuwwa (d. 1329), for instance, each contain sections prescribing restrictive measures on *dhimmis*, including a ban on displaying the Cross in public spaces and the regulation of the Christian call to prayer.[36]

The Pact of ʿUmar also provided Muslim writers outside the legal profession with a framework for attacking the perceived privileges of non-Muslims, particularly where inter-religious rivalries in the state bureaucracy were concerned. In his *Radd ʿalā ahl al-dhimma*, al-Ghāzī al-Wāsiṭī, who served in both Ayyūbid and Mamluk bureaucracies, bitterly complains about Christians who flout the rules of the Pact by openly displaying the Cross and violently striking their clappers.[37] Issues of visibility and audibility are brought to the fore in the same work as al-Waṣiṭī recounts the alleged excesses of non-Muslims during the Mongol invasion of Syria in 1259. Here, the Christians of Damascus are said to have paraded crosses—among other religious paraphernalia—outside Muslim homes, mosques, and *madrasas*, while playing drums, trumpets, and cymbals (*al-ṭubūl wa-l-būqāt wa-l-ṣunūj*), and shouting, 'exalted Cross!'[38] A similar scene occurs in a Sufi treatise by ʿAbd al-Ghaffār ibn Nūḥ, who describes an incident in the Upper

[33] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma*, ed. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, 2 vols., 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1994), 2:657–873.

[34] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma*, 2:152, discussed in Tamer El Leithy, 'Sufis, Copts and the Politics of Piety: Moral Regulation in the Fourteenth-Century Upper Egypt', in *The Development of Sufism in Mamluk Egypt*, ed. Richard McGregor and Adam Sabra (Cairo: Institut français d'archeologie orientale, 2006), 75–119, 117, n. 253; Antonia Bosanquet, *Minding Their Place: Space and Religious Hierarchy in Ibn al-Qayyim's Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 289–291.

[35] Ronald Paul, 'The Muḥtasib', *Arabica* 39, no. 1 (1992): 59–177, esp. 101–103. For the role of the *muḥtasib* in the later Middle Ages, see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:358.

[36] Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Naṣr al-Shayzarī, *Nihāyat al-rutba fī ṭalab al-ḥisba*, ed. Albāz al-ʿUraynī (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-al-Tarjama wa-al-Nashr, 1365/1946), 120–122; Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Qurashī ibn Ukhuwwa, *Maʿālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*, ed. and tr. Reuben Levy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 13–16 (trans.); 38–46 (text).

[37] Ghāzī ibn al-Wāsiṭī, *Kitāb radd ʿalā ahl al-dhimma*, in Richard J.H. Gottheil, 'An Answer to the Dhimmis', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 41 (1921): 383–457, here 391 (text), 422–423 (trans.). For al-Wāsiṭī's anti-Christian attitudes, see David Thomas ('Idealism and Intransigence: A Christian–Muslim Encounter in Early Mamluk Times', *Mamluk Studies Review* 13 [2009]: 86–102, here 92) has noted that by the thirteenth century, 'it is likely that the regulations of the Pact of ʿUmar had become so internalized into Muslim consciousness that they formed the framework in which attitudes to matters of society and religion were expressed'.

[38] Al-Wāsiṭī, *Radd ʿalā ahl al-dhimma*, 408 (text), 446 (trans.).

Egyptian town of Qūṣ that took place in 1307. Yet again, Christians are said to have disregarded the Pact of ʿUmar by parading crosses through the *maydān* and rowdily playing musical instruments, moving the town's *faqīrs* to instigate the destruction of churches.[39]

Muslim hostility to Christian practices could arguably arise from anxieties about identity and differentiation in Islamicate societies. For many Islamic jurists, theologians, and exegetes, such attitudes found expression in the interpretation of the Qur'ānic injunction in Q 2:42, 'Confound not the truth with falsehood' (*lā talbisu al-ḥaqq bi-l-bāṭil*), together with the prophetic *ḥadīth* 'Do not assimilate yourselves' (*lā tashabbahū*).[40] These concerns have been studied largely in their early Islamic context, with some arguing that emergent Islamic exegetical, theological, and legal practices sought to preserve the identity of an elite minority of Muslims in the recently conquered territories.[41] However, Christian practices in later centuries were still considered pervasive enough for jurists like Ibn Taymiyya to address them.[42] In a *fatwā* on the Pact of ʿUmar, he affirms restrictions on displaying the Cross and striking the clapper, among other stipulations.[43] Elsewhere, in his *Iqtiḍā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm* ('The Necessity of the Straight Path in Distinction from the People of Hell'), he issues a series of lengthy admonishments against imitation (*tashabbuh*) of non-Muslim ritual. Noteworthy among them is a discourse on Christian festivals, in which he mentions public celebrations on Maundy Thursdays that involve the hanging of crosses on doors and processions with pieces of copper struck like mini-clappers (*yazuffūna bi-nuḥās yaḍribūnahu ka-annahu nāqūs ṣaghīr*)—all of which he denounces as vile (*qabīḥ*), particularly in cases where Muslims partake in such festivities.[44] The Sufi thinker Ibn ʿArabī expressed similar anxieties about Christian influences while residing in Malatya, which had been recently conquered by the Rūm Seljuks from the Byzantines and thus remained at this time

[39] ʿAbd al-Ghaffār ibn Nūḥ, *Wāḥid fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd*, in Denis Gril, 'Une émeute antichrétienne à Qūṣ au début du VII^{e}/XIV^{e} siècle', *Annales islamologiques* 16 (1980): 241–274, here 246 (text), 260–261 (trans.). This incident and others like it are analysed by El-Leithy, 'Sufis, Copts and the Politics of Piety', 75–119.

[40] Albrecht Noth, 'Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen. Die "Bedingungen" ʿUmars "*aš-šurūṭ al-ʿumariyya*" unter einem anderen Aspekt gelesen', *Jeruslam Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 291–315, esp. 308 for the Qur'ānic injunction and *ḥadīth* report; Meir J. Kister, '"Do Not Assimilate Yourselves . . . ": *La tashabbahu*', *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam* 12 (1989): 321–370.

[41] In addition to the previous note, see Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–7 for a *status questionis*.

[42] Mark R. Cohen (*Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008], 28) has compared Ibn Taymiyya's concern about 'Christianizing' influences in Islam such as the reverence of Sufi saints and the cult of shrines to the Church Fathers' preoccupation with the 'problem of Judaizing' in early Christianity.

[43] For this *fatwā*, see Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya', 862–863.

[44] Taqī al-Dīn ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtiḍā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm*, Nāṣir ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-ʿAql, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1404/1984), 1:476.

overwhelmingly non-Muslim. In a letter of political council, Ibn ʿArabī exhorts the sultan ʿIzz al-Dīn Kaykāʾūs I (r. 1211–1220) to take a hard line on his Christian subjects by strictly enforcing the 'conditions that were stipulated (*al-shurūṭ allatī shtaraṭaha*) by the Prince of the Faithful, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb'.[45]

*

Christian practices and symbols were equally well-represented in the medieval Arabo-Islamic poetic imaginary, which is of especial interest here (as we shall see in Section 5.3.2 below). Although mostly written in the tenth century, the genre of *diyārāt* (accounts of Christian monasteries by Muslim writers) was well known to cosmographers and literary encyclopaedists of the Mongol and Mamluk periods.[46] Hilary Kilpatrick has described these accounts as a 'non-polemical approach to Christian customs and institutions'.[47] Here, monasteries appear as places where Muslims could find merriment (usually in the form of wine drinking and music), amorous retreat, and healing.[48] In the *diyārāt* of ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Shābushtī (d. 998) one finds bacchanalian verses (*khamriyyāt*) set to the sound of monks chanting and striking the clapper amid music, wine-drinking, and other revelries. A notable example comes from a poem attributed to Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Tharwānī, who, during a stay at the Monastery of Ushmūnī outside Baghdad, enjoins his listener to

> Drink to the sound of the clappers,
> as dawn comes to Ushmūnī's convent.
> Don't spurn the glass of wine when night's ending
> in happiness, not in misery,
> except for the sound of the clappers
> and the chant of the priests and deacons.

[45] The letter is preserved in Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, 4: 547–548, here 547. The suggestion that the letter reflects Ibn ʿArabī's anxieties about the preponderance of Christians in the newly conquered territory of Malatya was first made by Speros Vryonis (*The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* [Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1971], 225–226), and followed by Stephen Hirtenstein, who reasons that, 'Although he mentions *ahl al-dhimma*, it is clear from this passage that Ibn ʿArabī primarily means Christians, who were by far the most numerous community in Anatolia after centuries of Byzantine rule, and his apparently categorical statement should therefore be interpreted within that context. As he writes himself earlier in the letter, "It is incumbent on me to respond with religious council and divine political advice *according to what is suitable to the moment*".' 'Ibn ʿArabī', *CMR* 4 (2012): 145–149, here 148.

[46] Many of these accounts are preserved in such works as the *Muʿjam al-buldān* of Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī ibn ʿAbdallah al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229); the *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-ʿibād* of Zakariyya ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283); and the first volume of the *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* of Ibn Faḍlallah al-ʿUmarī (d. 1337). See Hilary Kilpatrick, 'Monasteries through Muslim Eyes: the *diyārāt* Books', in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in Abbasid Iraq*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 19–37, here 20.

[47] Kilpatrick, 'Monasteries through Muslim Eyes', 19.

[48] G.E. von Grunbaum, 'Aspects of Arabic Urban Literature in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', *Islamic Studies* 8 (1969): 294–295.

Things have their causes; good description
should have a firm foundation.
So drink away, and if not
go live next to a graveyard![49]

On the other hand, such depictions can also be read as containing a polemical subtext. In a doctoral thesis on the *diyārāt* of al-Shābushtī, Elizabeth Campbell argues that Muslim revelry in monasteries served to undermine and subvert Christian claims of piety and continence, often by characterizing these places as centres of sexual abandon and debauchery.[50] The mixing of sacred and profane imagery is also typified in the genres of libertinism (*mujūn*) and obscenity (*sukhf*) in Arabic and Persian *ghazal*. Here, we often encounter the Christian youth as the unrequited object of the Muslim poet's desire.[51] Such encounters as these also take place in monasteries and churches where the youth's Christianity is invariably stereotyped through such objects as the girdle (*zunnār*), the Cross, and the church clapper, as occurs in the poetry of Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 813–15), Mudrik al-Shaybānī (d. after 912), and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 1221).[52] Lewis Franklin has argued that these amorous encounters reflect a broader discourse on political emasculation, whereby such religious trappings as the Cross and clapper bespeak the Christian's social inferiority and misguided religious adherence.[53] With that said, such libertine tendencies in medieval Arabic poetry could also feature Islamic religious motifs, not least the *adhān*.[54] Conversely, as will

[49] ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shābushtī, *al-Diyārāt*, ed. Kūrkīs ʿAwwād, 2nd ed. (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1386/1966), 48–49, from a forthcoming translation of the *Diyārāt* by Hilary Kilpatrick, who kindly improved my initial rendering of these verses into English. For similar examples, see Zayyāt, *al-Diyārāt al-naṣrāniyya*, 258–259 and 287–288.

[50] Elizabeth Campbell, 'A Heaven of Wine: Muslim–Christian Encounters at Monasteries in the Early Islamic Middle East' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2009), 150–152.

[51] Geert Jan van Gelder, 'Mudrik al-Shaybânî: Bad Taste or Harmless Wit?' in *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry*, ed. Gert Morg and Ed de Moor (Amsterdam: Radopi, 2001), 49–70, here 51; Zoltan Szombathy, *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature* (Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013), 81–82. For further examples, see Zayyāt, *Simāt al-naṣārā*, 47–50; James E. Montgomery, 'For the Love of a Christian Boy: A Song by Abū Nuwās', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 27, no. 2 (1996): 115–124; Franklin Lewis, 'Sexual Occidentation: the Politics of Conversion, Christian-Love and Boy-Love in 'Attār', *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (2009): 693–723.

[52] See, for instance, Zayyāt, *Ṣimāt al-naṣārā*, 47; Montgomery, 'For the Love of a Christian Boy', 118–119; Van Gelder, 'Mudrik al-Shaybānī's Poem on a Christian Boy', 62.

[53] Lewis, 'Sexual Occidentation', 694. See also Thomas Sizgorich, 'Muslims and their Daughters: Monasteries as Muslim Christian Boundaries', in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Spaces*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 193–216, here 194, arguing that 'monastic spaces' were conceived of by Muslim writers of *diyārāt* and related genres as 'an imagined space inhabited by idealized and abstracted Christian figures, figures that were suitable . . . for service as metonyms for an essentialized Christianity and essentialized Christian subjects'.

[54] See, for example, Philip F. Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry: Abū Nuwās and the Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 220–223. See in particular one wine song by Abū Nuwās which contains the verse: 'Don't you see the dawn breaking / Like a shawl made of straw? / So hand me a cup of solace / at the *adhān* of the *muʾadhdhin*.' Abū Nuwās, *Der Dīwān des Abū Nuwās, Teil III*, ed. Ewald Wagner (Wiesbaden: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1988), 317.

become clear below, Islamo-Arabic poetry featuring the clapper could also reflect sober, moralizing themes.

Further encounters in Arabic literature involved the trope of the clapper drowning out the Muslim call to prayer. The *Kitāb al-aghānī* ('Book of Songs') of Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967) relates how Christians in the city of Kūfa would strike the clapper each time the *muʾadhdhin* wished to sound the call to prayer, and sing loudly when the *shaykh* began the Friday sermon.[55] According to two satirical verses by the blind poet al-Maʿarrī (d. 1058), preserved in the geographical dictionary of Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229), the acoustic environment elsewhere was no less charged. In Latakia, we are told, 'the rancour twixt Aḥmad [i.e., Muḥammad] and Christ peaks; / this one takes to the clapper while the *shaykh* in fury shrieks'.[56] We have already discussed reactions by Muslim jurists and others to the Christian presence in Islamicate society, with ritual practice and the Pact of 'Umar serving as central points of reference. Similar topoi could also occur in poetry. For instance, in a *qaṣīda* commemorating the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258, a poet laments what he perceives as the ascendancy of the city's Christian population: 'High stands the Cross atop its *minbars* / and he whom the girdle (*zunnār*) once confined has become its master.'[57]

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As for more systematic polemics against Christianity, those mentioned so far in this study have tended to focus more on 'primary topics' (Trinity, Incarnation, etc.) than matters of ritual. A more inclusive coverage, however, is found in the *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira* of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī. In this work, al-Qarāfī attacks a range of Christian practices about which he appears remarkably well informed. Much of his polemic is premised on the idea that Christian ritual was innovated by emperors, priests, and church councils, thus leading to the corruption and falsification of Christ's original teachings.[58] Concerning Constantine's famous vision, he claims that the emperor probably lied about this for the good of his subjects (*li-iṣlāḥ raʿiyyatihi*). Such historical anecdotes, therefore, are untrustworthy authorities on which to base such practices as venerating the Cross, especially since they are nowhere contained in revealed law (*lā yataqayyadu fī*

[55] Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects*, 104–105, citing Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, ed. Naṣr Hūrīnī, 20 vols. (Būlāq: Dār al-Ṭibāʿa al-ʿĀmira, 1285/1868), 19:59.

[56] Cited and translated in Lawrence Conrad, 'Ibn Buṭlān in *bilād al-shām*: The Career of a Travelling Christian Physician', in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 131–157, here 151.

[57] Joseph de Somogyi, 'A Qaṣīda on the Destruction of Baghdād by the Mongols', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 7, no. 1 (1933): 44 (text), 45 (trans.).

[58] This tendency among late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Muslim polemicists has been described by Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics', 71–79. See also Nadia Maria El Sheikh, 'The Conversion of Constantine the Great', *Türklük Bilgis Araştırmaları* 36 (2011): 69–83, esp. 74–78 for polemical re-readings of the Constantine legend by medieval Arabo-Islamic writers.

al-sharʿiyyāt).[59] On al-Qarāfī's view, this falsification of Christ's original teachings has led the Christians to apply a symbol of great shame and ignominy (*ihāna ʿaẓīma*) to a man they claim to be God.[60]

The legend of the Discovery of the Cross is also subjected to scrutiny in al-Iskandarānī's *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya*. He reports that the True Cross is believed by Christians to have been uncovered beneath a rubbish heap (*mazbala*). And yet, he points out in disbelief, they adorn their churches with this very symbol, tattoo it on their skin (*ṭabaʿūhu ʿalā ajsāmihim*), and make its sign with their fingers.[61] In line with al-Qarāfī, al-Iskandarānī affirms the charge that the feast days commemorating the Discovery of the Cross have no basis in revealed law (*lā aṣl lahum fī sharʿihim*).[62] Furthermore, he claims that the Jew said to have been Helena's informant lied about the Cross's whereabouts. After being threatened with torture, he buried three sticks beneath a rubbish heap, later claiming one of them to be the True Cross.[63] Since it is written in the Gospels that Jesus was crucified alongside two thieves, al-Iskandarānī reasons that it would have been easy to dupe the empress. Thus, he concludes, the Christians' rationale for adopting the Cross as their emblem (*shiʿār*) and celebrating the Feast of the Cross is based on little more than an elaborate swindle (*ʿalā wajh laʿb*).[64]

In his discussion of how Christians came to use the clapper in their call to prayer, al-Iskandarānī betrays further knowledge of sacred tradition. He begins by examining the Christian claim that Noah was ordered by God to ring a bell (*an yaduqqa al-jaras*) in order to gather the animals into the Ark.[65] It is unclear to me where precisely the author derives this information. It conforms to the *Cave of Treasures* legend mentioned above, though in al-Iskandarānī's account a bell (*jaras*) rather than a wooden clapper (*nāqūs*) is mentioned.[66] Elements of Christian exegetical lore were certainly known to earlier Muslim writers, namely the historians al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 897/8) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) who incorporate strands of the *Cave of Treasures* tradition into their accounts of the biblical prophets, but make no mention of Noah's use of a clapper or bell.[67] It is likely, though by no means certain, that this information was known to

[59] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 411.
[60] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 411.
[61] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 338–339.
[62] Al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 338.
[63] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 87.
[64] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 88.
[65] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 29, 78.
[66] For pre-modern definitions of the word *jaras* as 'bell', see Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon*, 2:143. See also Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 4:598, who defines *jaras* as that 'which is struck (*alladhī yuḍrab*)', synonymous with the word *juljul*, 'which is hung on cattle' (*yuʿallaqu ʿalā al-dawābb*).
[67] For each of these authors' account of the Flood, see Aḥmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ibn-Wādhih qui dicitur al-Jaʿqubī Historiae*, ed. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 1:8–14; Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje et al., 13 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), 2:40. For their reliance on aspects of the *Cave of Treasures*, see Albrecht Götze, 'Die Nachwirkung der Schatzhöle', *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* 3 (1925): 53–71, here 60–71.

al-Iskandarānī through a historical work by the Melkite writer Saʿīd ibn Biṭrīq, who transmits the legend in Arabic and whose work was also known to Ibn Taymiyya, as will be discussed shortly. In any case, al-Iskandarānī tells us that Noah's role in originating the Christian call to prayer, though well-known and oft-mentioned (*mashhūra wa-madhkūra*), is inconsistent with the fact that most Christians employed a wooden clapper (*nāqūs*) rather than a bell in their call to prayer, which he claims was adopted after the Second Council of Alexandria, some four hundred years after Christ's crucifixion.[68] In a withering turn he suggests that the real reason why Christians strike wood (*ḍarb ʿalā al-khashaba*) is that it is more fitting to their subordinate status (*aqrab ilaykum fī al-nasab*).[69]

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) also refutes Christian ritual in his *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, in which he attacks several practices he believes have no revelatory basis. In response to claims in the *Letter from the People of Cyprus* that the New Law (i.e., the abrogated Mosaic Law) was received from Christ through the apostles, Ibn Taymiyya cites the Christian celebration of feast days as proof that this cannot be so. In particular, he argues that the Feast of the Cross was instituted only after Helena discovered it centuries after the death of Christ and the apostles, mentioning by name a version of the legend transmitted by Saʿīḍ ibn Biṭrīq.[70] As for its veneration in worship, Ibn Taymiyya accuses Christians of 'committing *shirk* by adopting images and the Cross' (*bi-ttikhādh al-tamāthīl wa-l-ṣalīb*).[71] Furthermore, he grounds his interpretation of Q 5:23 ('certainly they disbelieve who say "God is the third of three"') in a *ḥadīth* report according to which, 'The Hour will not come before the Son of Mary comes down among you as an equitable judge, and he will break the cross and kill the swine.'[72]

In addition to attacking Christianity's historical foundations and mounting accusations of associationism (*shirk*), Ibn Taymiyya argues against the belief that the Crucifixion was a form of divine deception—that is, Satan, driven by an insatiable appetite for human souls, was tricked into accepting God's sacrifice of His son, ignorant that the latter's death would redeem humankind. We have already discussed how salvation narratives involving divine deception were used by Christian apologists in Christological discussions with Muslims. Though patristic in origin, these narrative redescriptions of Christ's death featured prominently in Christian–Muslim debates about the salvific power of the Crucifixion.[73]

[68] I have been unable to find any reference to a Second Council of Alexandria at which the call to prayer was defined.

[69] Ps.-Qarāfī, *Adilla*, 78.

[70] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb*, 3:30–32. The same narrative is discussed in ibid., 3:141, 4:210, 225–226. Cf. Ibn Biṭrīq, *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, 129–130.

[71] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb*, 3:30.

[72] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb*, 2:31. On this *ḥadīth* and its sources, see Swanson, 'Folly to the *ḥunafā*'', 48, 65.

[73] I take the term 'narrative redescription' from Mark Swanson, who employs it in his discussion of the doctrine of divine deception in Christians–Muslim debates during the opening three Islamic

Ibn Taymiyya makes no less than twelve arguments against the doctrine, the most salient of which rest on the premise that Christianity denies humankind's agency in its own salvation. For if Christ gained victory over death through God's sacrifice, then Adam's descendants prior to Christ's death would have been accountable for the sins of the father (*dhanb abīhim*), including the prophet Abraham whose father was an unbeliever.[74] Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya asks why God chose to save humankind by sacrificing His son when he could have done so directly and from the beginning. He then posits that the Christian doctrine of salvation implies that divine justice does not extend to those who came before Christ, including the prophets who (according to many Islamic traditions) were sinless (*maʿṣūmīn*).[75] Alternatively, the implication is that deception was employed by God due to his inability (*taʿjīz*) to confront Satan directly, making Him neither just nor powerful.[76] In this way, Ibn Taymiyya undermines Christianity's special reverence of Christ's death—and hence the Cross—as the instrument of humankind's salvation.

The famous Ḥanbalite jurist also makes arguments from Christian and Jewish scripture to support Muḥammad's prophethood and (of greater interest to us here) the superiority of Islamic ritual practice. Where the call to prayer is concerned, he focuses his attention on Psalm 149:1–7, which begins with the words 'Praise the lord. Sing to the Lord a new song . . .' Ibn Taymiyya paraphrases the passage as follows:

> Praise the Lord with a new praise (*tasbīḥan jadīdan*) and let they whose nation God has chosen for Himself and given victory rejoice in the Creator. He has rewarded with dignity the righteous who praise Him from their beds[77] and exalt God with raised voices (*yukabbirūna Allāh bi-aṣwāt murtafiʿa*), with double-edged swords in their hands, that they might inflict vengeance upon the nations who do not worship Him.[78]

Ibn Taymiyya argues that these verses are 'in conformity with the characteristics of Muḥammad and his nation (*tanṭabiqu ʿalā ṣifāt Muḥammad wa-ummatihi*), since it is they who exalt God with raised voices in their *adhān* of the five prayers'.[79] Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya cites numerous traditions in which the Prophet and his companions pronounced the *takbīr* in times of battle, in addition to Qurʾānic verses interpreted as requirements for the magnification of God in

centuries ('Folly to the *ḥunafā*", 151–228 and 163–167). For the patristic origins of the doctrine, see Nicholas P. Constas, 'The Last Temptation of Satan: Divine Deception in Greek Patristic Interpretations of the Passion Narrative', *Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2004): 139–163.

[74] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:107–108.

[75] Ibn Taymiyya *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:111, 113.

[76] Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 2:114–116.

[77] Cf. Ps 149:5 ('Let his faithful people rejoice in this honour and sing for joy in their beds').

[78] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:226.

[79] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:226–227.

times of pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), ritual slaughter (*dhabḥ*), and religious festivals (Ramaḍān, ʿĪd al-Fiṭr, etc.).[80] Thus, Ibn Taymiyya concludes, it is surely the Muslims who praise God in the manner prescribed in the Psalms rather than the Christians, who neither glorify God with raised voices nor inflict vengeance on the Gentiles with double-edged swords. Instead, they strike a clapper (*nāqūs*) to glorify God, reproaching any who take up the sword against unbelievers (*qad taʿību man yuqātilu al-kuffār bi-l-suyūf*).[81]

5.2 ʿAbdīshōʿ *apologia crucis*

In the previous section we explored accusations that the use of the Cross in Christian worship was an innovation based on little more than fanciful legends, in addition to oft-repeated charges that its veneration was tantamount to associationism. In what follows I demonstrate how ʿAbdīshōʿ grounds the veneration of the Cross in biblical proof-texts while appealing to a theological language common to Christians and Muslims. Yet in addition to negotiating common ground, ʿAbdīshōʿ is keen to defend the historical foundations of Christian ritual by reminding his readership of the sacred traditions and narratives underpinning the Church's theology of the Cross. The main sources for ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology of the Cross are his *Pearl* and his *Durra*, though we also find a brief section on it in his *Ṭukkās dīnē*.

5.2.1 The Cross in Scripture

Before turning to ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology of the Cross, let us briefly take note of some earlier conversations with Muslims on the subject. Among the topics featured in these discussions was the role of Christ's crucifixion in humankind's salvation. A notable example comes from a Syriac text known as the *Disputation between an Arab Notable and a Monk from Bēt Ḥalē*, which narrates a dialogue between an unnamed Nestorian monk and a Muslim official at a monastery near Kūfa, thought to have taken place during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Yazīd II (r. 720–724).[82] When the Muslim wishes to know why Christians venerate the Cross, the monk responds that, 'Through it we are freed from error, and through it

[80] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:227–232. Ibn Taymiyya goes so far as to claim that Christians refer to ʿĪd al-Fiṭr as 'the festival of "God is Great"' (*ʿīd Allāhu akbar*). Ibid., 5:232.

[81] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:235–236.

[82] On the dating and *Sitz im Leben* of the *Disputation*, see Sydney H. Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Ḥâlê and a Muslim Emir', *Hugoye* 3, no. 1 (2000): 29–54, here 13–26 and Gerrit J. Reinink, 'The Veneration of Icons, the Cross and the Bones of the Martyrs in an Early East-Syrian Apology against Islam', in *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für*

we are delivered from death and Satan.'[83] In support of this statement the monk presents his opponent with a soteriological typology from Nm 21:8–9. Here, Moses's staff is argued to prefigure the wood of the Cross, since any who were bitten by a snake were saved by gazing upon it.[84] The same proof-text occurs in the disputation between Timothy I and al-Mahdī, and later in Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's (d. 1171) refutation of Islam.[85] The *Scholion* of Theodore bar Kōnī, the *Kitāb al-burhān* of Peter of Bayt Ra'ṣ, and the *Kitāb al-majdal* of ʿAmr ibn Mattā all discuss this proof-text, adding that the staff of Moses enabled the Israelites to inflict plagues on the Egyptians, part the Red Sea, strike a stone to create a spring, and defeat the Amalekites.[86] The all-conquering and life-giving nature of the Cross is also affirmed in the *Apology of al-Kindī* and a brief treatise by Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn, each of which compare it to the Covenant in Nm 35:10 where Moses holds it aloft and says: 'Rise up, Lord, and let your enemies be defeated.'[87]

In his apologetic oeuvre, ʿAbdīshōʿ recognizes a similar need to provide scriptural testimonies for the salvific power of the Cross. Unlike the proof-texts discussed above, however, these testimonies are drawn largely from the New Testament, thus hinting at an effort to prove that the Cross's use in Christian worship is founded on the teachings of Christ and the apostles. Citing Rm 5:10, he states in the *Pearl* that if humankind was reconciled to God by the sacrifice of His son, then crucifixion must be the means through which renewal and redemption (*ḥuddāṯā w-purqānā*) were worked.[88] Far greater use is made of biblical proof-texts in the *Durra*. In support of Christ's death as the means by which eternal life and salvation were delivered to humankind, ʿAbdīshōʿ

Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburstag, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 329–342, here 339–342. The identity of the monk is uncertain from the text but is identified by ʿAbdīshōʿ in his *Catalogue* as 'Abraham, who wrote a disputation against the Arabs'. *Catalogue*, 110 (text), 214 (trans.).

[83] Anonymous, *Drāšā da-hwā l-ḥaḏ man ṭayyāyā ʿam ʾīḥīḏāyā ḥaḏ b-ʿumrā d-B̲ēṯ Ḥālē*, in David G.K. Taylor, 'The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation', in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Sydney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 187–242, here 230.

[84] Anonymous, *Drāšā*, 232. Cf. Ephrem the Syrian, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodam Commentarii*, ed. and tr. Raymond Tonneau, CSCO 152–153 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1955), 136 (text), 116 (trans.). For similar representations of the staff of Moses in Ephrem and other early Syriac Fathers, see Cyril Aphrem Karim, 'Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers' (PhD diss, St Patrick's College, 1994), 95–99.

[85] Timothy, *Disputation mit dem Kalifen*, § 9,8; Bar Ṣalībī, *A Response to the Arabs*, 92–93 (text), 85 (trans.). Cf. similar typologies in Karim, 'Symbols of the Cross', 99–102; Ishōʿdād of Merv, *Commentaire d'Išoʿdad de Merv sur l'Ancient Testament, II: Exode–Deutéronome*, ed. and tr. Ceslas van den Eynde, CSCO 176, 179 (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1958), 103 (text), 139 (trans.); idem, *Commentaries*, 1:228 (trans.), 3:130–131 (text), (on the parallel verse John 3:14).

[86] Bar Kōnī, *Liber scholiorum (Seert)*, 2:272 (text), idem, *Scholies (Séert)*, 2:202 (trans.); Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 139v–140v; Ps.-Eutychius, *The Book of the Demonstration*, §§ 447–448.

[87] Tartar, 'Ḥiwār islāmī-masīḥī', 166; Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn, *Maqāla fī al-radd ʿalā al-yahūd wa-l-muslimīn alladhīna yattahimūna al-naṣārā bi-ʿibādat al-aṣnām wa-sujūdihim li-l-ṣalīb wa-ikrāmihim ṣuwar al-Masīḥ wa-l-Sayyida wa-l-qiddīsīn*, in *Vingt traités*, 158–165, here 159.

[88] *Pearl*, 48.

supplies a battery of testimonies from the Gospel of John—a gospel which, as discussed in the previous chapter, featured prominently in Christological discussions with Muslims. Where the soteriology of the Cross is concerned, the following Johannine passages are discussed:

1. Jn 17:3, where Jesus declares eternal life to be knowledge 'that You alone are true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent'. It should be noted that this verse features in the polemics of ʿAlī ibn Rabban (d. 780) al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), as well as the Bible commentary of the Ḥanbalite jurist Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Qawī al-Ṭūfī (d. 1316), all of whom interpret it to demonstrate that Christians reject the very monotheism that Christ himself preached.[89] For ʿAbdīshōʿ, however, the promise of eternal life is consonant with—if not contingent on—the belief in God's oneness. To this effect, he interprets Jn 17:3 to signify that 'Christianity is knowledge of the Real (*maʿrifat al-Ḥaqq*), professing the oneness of His divinity (*iqrār waḥdāniyyat rubūbatihi*), faith in His Messiah, and holding His revelation to be true (*taṣdīq bi-bishāratihi*).'[90]

2. Jn 10:10, in which Christ states that he had come 'that they might have life, and have it abundantly', followed by Jn 12:24, which contains Christ's allegory of the kernel of wheat dying and reaping fruit. According to ʿAbdīshōʿ, these two passages indicate that 'life' (*ḥayāt*)—said to mean the 'happiness of the hereafter' (*yurīdu al-saʿāda al-ukhrawiyya*)—is dependent on Christ's death and resurrection (*mawqūf ʿalā mawtihi wa-qiyāmatihi*).[91] The Cross, by implication, is argued to be the means by which this promise was delivered, an interpretation we find in earlier exegetes, namely Theodore of Mopsuestia and Īshōʿdād of Merv.[92] To add weight to this interpretation, ʿAbdīshōʿ cites Paul's words in 1 Cor 1:18, that the 'Cross is foolishness to the perishing, but to those who are living it is the power of God.'[93]

3. Jn 12:27, in which Jesus announces that his time had not yet come. ʿAbdīshōʿ presents this verse as an indication that the Crucifixion was 'truly necessary' (*ḍarūrī ḥatman*),[94] implying that Christ possessed knowledge of his death and sacrificed himself willingly, thereby affirming the unified operation of Christ's will with the working of God's economy in humankind's salvation.

[89] The interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Qayyim are quoted discussed in Accad, 'The Gospels in the Muslim and Christian Exegetical Discourse', 164–166. For al-Ṭūfī, see Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Qawī al-Ṭūfī, *al-Sayf al-murhaf fī al-radd ʿalā al-musḥaf*, in Lejla Demiri, *Muslim Exegesis of the Bible: Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī's (d. 716/1316) Commentary on the Christian Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), §§ 320–321, where he declares that Christ's statement in Jn 17:3 indicates that 'he is neither God Himself, nor a hypostasis of Him' (*al-Masīḥ laysa huwa huwa wa-lā uqnūman minhu*).

[90] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 3. Cf. medieval Christian Arabic definitions of Christianity discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.8.

[91] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 6.

[92] Theodore, *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius*, 201 (text), 143 (trans.) for whom having life 'abundantly' means 'eternal life and resurrection' because of Christ's death on the Cross. According to Īshōʿdād, *The Commentaries*, 1: 257, 4: 171, the dying kernel signifies the 'suffering on the Cross' as cause of redemption.

[93] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 9.

[94] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 8.

The latter theme—the providential nature of Christ's death—is expanded upon in the *Durra*'s discourse on the Cross. ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of salvation narrative has already been discussed in the previous chapter. A similar (and connected) strategy emerges in our author's explanation of Christ's death and its redemptive purpose, as we will now see.

ʿAbdīshōʿ begins by paraphrasing Paul in Rm. 5:19, in which the apostle declares that humankind's mortality—resulting from Adam's fall—was redeemed by 'the obedience of the one man', thus making Christ 'the cause of life for all of humanity' (*ʿillat al-ḥayāt li-l-bashar bi-asrihi*).[95] In order to explain how humankind could regain eternal life, he presents a salvation history similar to that discussed in the previous chapter. Here, we are told that Adam's descendants persisted in their father's sin by committing idolatry (*bi-ttikhādhihim al-aṣnām*), despite God's repeated sending of prophets, an action described by ʿAbdīshōʿ as 'the promise and the threat' (*al-waʿd wa-l-waʿīd*), which humankind failed to heed due to having been overcome by sin (*li-stilāʾ sulṭān al-khaṭīʾa ʿalayhim*).[96] Furthermore, he asserts that God's love for humanity meant that He 'compassionately aided (*laṭafa al-Bāriʾ raʾfatan*) his servants and creation, since there is no greater intercessor (*shafīʿ*) than Himself'.[97] Now, as we noted in the previous chapter, the term *luṭf* and its variants featured prominently in Muslim *kalām* circles as well as being employed in ʿAbdīshōʿ's king parable. It should be pointed out that the same applies to the concept of *al-waʿd wa-l-waʿīd*, one of the 'Five Principles' (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) formulated by the Muʿtazilite theologian Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 849) to convey the idea that God rewards good and punishes evil as a matter of necessity (*ḍarūra*).[98] The significance of ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of the term will be discussed in due course, but for now let us return to the *Durra*'s salvation narrative, which informs us that God's facilitating grace came in the form of the Incarnation and Christ's eventual crucifixion. Employing East Syrian Christological language observed in the previous chapter, ʿAbdīshōʿ lends this interpretation to the following Gospel passages:

> He manifested His eternal Word in their world, armoured (*mudarraʿan*) in human form from the tribe of Adam. Through him [*scil.*, Christ] He perfected their defects and worked their salvation by sacrificing that human being for them, though, being free of sin, he was unworthy of death, as it says in the glorious gospel: 'God loved the world so much that He gave his only son' (Jn 3:13). Having established that nothing in him was deserving death, even though scripture attests to his death, then it has [also] been established that his death was for a great reason and enormous benefit. This is what the Gospel supplies concerning

[95] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 10. [96] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 20. [97] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 22.
[98] Ulrich Rudolph, 'al-waʿd wa-'l-waʿīd', *EI²* 11 (2002): 6–7.

> our Lord when it says: 'This is my body given to you as ransom for all people' (paraphrase of 1 Tim 2:6) and 'This is my blood shed as forgiveness for the sins of the many' (Mat 26:28).[99]

Implicit in this redemptive Christology is the argument that, far from being accountable for the 'sins of the fathers', human beings possessed freedom of action after Adam's fall and so *chose* to turn away from eternal life. Because mankind could not be compelled by the prophets, whose role was simply to guide humankind, the Incarnation and Christ's death were necessary for God to carry out His redemptive mission—without forcing humankind to accept divine mercy by will alone. It is worth noting here that the concausality of man's moral autonomy and divine reward is an old principle in the Syriac exegetical tradition.[100] Where anti-Muslim apologetics are concerned, Barbara Roggema has observed that similar salvation narratives to the one discussed above served to support the view that there was little need for God to vanquish Satan directly, since the latter acknowledges the omnipotence and superiority of the former. But by deceiving Satan, God could claim that humankind followed Him willingly, thereby exposing Satan's guilt.[101] Admittedly, ʿAbdīshōʿ does not mention the term *iḥtiyāl* ('deception') in the *Durra*'s section on the Cross (as he does in the same work's Christological chapter). Moreover, the notion that there was anything obligatory about God's actions was far from universally accepted by Muslim theologians. The main source of opposition to the doctrine of *al-waʿd wa-l-waʿīd* came most notably from Ashʿarite circles, in particular, from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, to whom al-Ṭūsī and al-Ḥillī each responded vigorously.[102] Nevertheless, ʿAbdīshōʿ's employment of such terms once again hints at a theological idiom that addresses Muslim claims about the arbitrariness and absurd elaborateness of God's purported sacrifice. In Chapters 3 and 4 we discussed ʿAbdīshōʿ's arguments for the teleological direction of God's actions. In a similar vein, our author seems to imply here that Christ's death on the Cross was part of a broader scheme: to fulfil the obligatory promise of divine reward in the form of eternal life.

[99] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 23–28.

[100] Aryeh Kofsky and Serge Ruzer, 'Justice, Free Will, and Divine Mercy in Ephrem's Commentary on Genesis 2-3', *Le Muséon* 113, no. 3–4 (2000): 315–332, here 332; James McCallum, 'Salvation in Christ in Later Antiochene Theology, According to Theodore, Nestorius, and Theodoret; a Study of Antiochene Christology in Relation to Soteriology' (PhD diss., Pacific School of Religion, 1966), 145–175.

[101] Roggema, 'King Parables', 129–130 with reference to three Melkite apologies, *On the Triune Nature of God*, Peter Bayt Raʾs's *Kitāb al-burhān*, and *The Disputation of George the Monk*.

[102] See their responses in al-Ṭūsī's *Talkhīṣ al-muḥaṣṣal*, 368–369 and Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī*, 224–225.

5.2.2 The Cross between Christian and Islamic Mortalism

Once concluding his salvation history in the *Durra*, ʿAbdīshōʿ places the first objection into the mouth of his non-Christian interlocutor: if the Cross did indeed conquer death, why, then, do human beings continue to die? Moreover, at which point does salvation occur (*ayna mawqiʿ al-khalāṣ*)? He responds that the greatest witness (*al-shāhid al-akbar*) to Christ's victory over death is his resurrection on the third day after the Crucifixion, through which Christ vouchsafed eternal life for mankind. It then falls upon ʿAbdīshōʿ to explain how and when this process occurs for those living *after* Christ's resurrection. To this end he employs the following analogy:

> Whoever realises that he has a second birth after death, eternal happiness, and everlasting bliss [...], how can he consider death to be [mere] death and abandonment of misery [mere] escape? Rather, he considers it a kind of slumber and sleep (*ḍarban min al-sana wa-l-nawm*).

Unfortunately, ʿAbdīshōʿ does not draw out this analogy any further, making his comparison somewhat vague. It is most likely, however, that the reference is to an eschatological doctrine known as hypnopsychism, or the 'sleep of the soul'. The early Syriac fathers Aphrahat (d. ca. 345), Ephrem (d. 373), and Narsai (d. ca. 500) held that the soul, upon its separation from the body in death, enters a state of dormition during which it 'dreams' of future reward or punishment before reuniting with the body.[103] Later writers of the Church of the East would subscribe to similar conceptions of mortalism. For instance, Timothy I held that the soul, as it awaits judgement and resurrection, loses its sensations together with the ability to distinguish good from evil, and is thus like an unborn embryo.[104] The Church would later uphold this principle during a Synod in 786–787, at which Timothy condemned the theologians John of Dalyāthā, John of Apamaea, and Joseph Ḥazzāyā for alleging that the soul retains sensation and awareness after death.[105] Opposition to this heresy, which

[103] Frank Gavin, 'The Sleep of the Soul in the Early Syriac Church', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 40 (1920): 103–120, here 103–6; Paul Krüger, 'Le sommeil des âmes dans l'oeuvre de Narsaï', *Oriens Syrianus* 4 (1959): 471–494, esp. 197–99; Philippe Gignoux, 'Les doctrines eschatologiques de Narsai', *Oriens Christianus* 11 (1966): 321–352, 461–488; 12 (1967): 23–54; Antigone Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50–600 AD)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 56–7.

[104] See Timothy's letter to Rabban Bōkhtīshōʿ, *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae*, ed. and tr. Oscar Baum, CSCO 74–75 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1914–1915), 54 (text), 32 (trans.), cited in Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2012), 309.

[105] For the synod's anathema (preserved in Arabic), see Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 3/1:100. The condemnation of these authors, however, would be overturned by Timothy's successor and rival Ishōʿ Bar Nūn (r. 823–827), as ʿAbdīshōʿ himself notes in his *Ṭukkās dīnē*, 92 (text), 93 (trans.). A disciple of John Ḥazzāyā named Nestorius, Bishop of Bēt Nuhadrā, was also anathematized for

its opponents characterized as 'Messalianism', was reaffirmed at a later synod convened by Timothy in 790.[106]

By the twilight of Late Antiquity hypnopsychism had become what Matthew Dal Santo has described 'an integral element of the received eschatology of the East Syrian Church'.[107] East Syrian theologians would continue to subscribe to it in later centuries, though it failed to gain acceptance among Miaphysite thinkers.[108] For instance, Ibn Jarīr produces several scriptural testimonies for the Resurrection, including Dan 12:2–3 ('multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt'), but stops short at likening death to sleep and resurrection to awakening.[109] Some two centuries later, Barhebraeus asserted in his *Candelabrum of the Sanctuaries* that the soul does indeed retain its senses after its separation from the body, and can perceive things in both a universal and particular way (*yāḏ̮ā napšā l-ḵolhōn suʿrānē kollānāyē wa-mnāṭāyē men bāṭar puršānā*).[110] Barhebraeus affirms this position in an Arabic abridgement of the *Candelabrum*'s chapter on psychology. Here, he argues that soul is conscious and aware (*ʿālima wa-mudrika*) after death.[111] The Copto-Arabic writer al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl mentions that 'certain Christians' (*baʿḍ al-naṣārā*, presumably Nestorians) believe the soul to be insentient (*ghayr shāʿira*) after death—a view he rejects in favour of the soul's post-mortem consciousness.[112]

The allusion to hypnopsychism in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra* is noteworthy for its absence in similar works of anti-Muslim apologetics. ʿAbdīshōʿ's mention serves a clear apologetic purpose: to affirm the Church's official teaching that death is merely a temporary state between the soul's separation from the body and the eternal life promised by Christ. More implicitly, ʿAbdīshōʿ may also be negotiating common ground with his Muslim interlocutor. The likening of sleep to death was a recurrent theme in Muslim exegetical circles, not least regarding the interpretation of the Qurʾānic verse 'God takes unto Himself the souls (*al-anfus*) at their

rejecting the soul's posthumous activity, though he would later recant; Antoine Guillaumont, 'Sources de la doctrine de Joseph Ḥazzâyâ', *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958): 3–24, here 16; Otto Braun, 'Zwei Synoden des Katholikos Timotheus I.', *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902): 283–311, here 302.

[106] For the acts of this synod, see Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, 599–603 (text), 603–608 (trans.).

[107] Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, 241.

[108] Gavin ('The Sleep of the Soul', 108) cites as examples Elias of Anbār (fl. 930) and Emmanuel bar Shaḥḥārē (d. 980). See also Solomon of Baṣra (fl. 1222), *The Book of the Bee*, ed. and tr. Ernest A. Wallis Budge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 100–101 (text), 132 (trans.).

[109] See Gabriel Khoury-Sarkis, 'Le livre de guide de Yahya ibn Jarir', *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967): 302–354, here 341.

[110] Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Psychologie de Grégoire Aboulfaradj dit Barhebraeus d'après la huitième base de l'ouvrage Le Candélabre des Sanctuaire*, ed. and tr. Ján Bakoš (Leiden: Brill, 1948), 103 (text), 59 (trans.).

[111] Gregory Abū al-Faraj Barhebraeus, *Risāla fī ʿilm al-nafs* (Jerusalem: Maṭbaʿat Dayr Mār Murqus li-l-Suryān fī-l-Quds, 1938), 64–66.

[112] Al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Fī ḥāl al-nafs baʿda mufāraqatihā al-badan wa-qabla al-qiyāma al-ʿāmma al-majmūʿ ʿalayhā*, in *Majmūʿ*, ch. 60, § 15.

deaths, and that which has not died [He takes] in its sleep (*fī manāmihā*)' (Q 39:42).[113] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī interprets this verse to mean that the soul experiences a temporary or partial separation (*inqiṭāʿ nāqiṣ*), only to return to its body upon the sleeper's awakening. Meanwhile, in death the soul undergoes a perfect separation (*inqiṭāʿ tāmm kāmil*).[114] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya also believed sleep to be a kind of 'lesser death', citing in support of this Q 39:42,[115] and asserts elsewhere that the souls of the living possess the ability to commune with the dead while asleep.[116] With that said, it is unclear from ʿAbdīshōʿ's *en passant* reference to 'soul sleep' whether he had the Muslim understanding of it in mind. What seems likelier is that his comparison of sleep to death provides some explanation to Christians (and hypothetical non-Christians) wishing to know what exactly is meant by salvation and eternal life, particularly in a world in which human mortality continues to prevail. ʿAbdīshōʿ's response to this problem is that salvation, and hence eternal life, occurs after a period of metaphorical sleep. Thus, our author draws on this hypnopsychism to support his community's soteriological understanding of Christ's death on the Cross.

5.2.3 The Cross as *qibla*: Rejecting Idolatry and Affirming Tradition

In addition to being a symbol of salvation, Christian apologists were also keen to affirm the status of the Cross as a legitimate tool of worship. The adamant denial that the adoration of the Cross constituted a form of idolatry occurs in some of the earliest apologies written against Islam. Unsatisfied with the monk's Old Testament typology of Moses's staff (discussed above), the Muslim notable in the *Disputation* with the monk at Bēt Ḥālē insists on knowing why Christians venerate the Cross, since the practice is not attested to in the Gospels. The monk responds that the Church does not receive its commandments from scripture alone; it also derives them from the traditions of the apostles, who worked great miracles by the sign of the Cross. Accordingly, the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist are consecrated through its sign.[117] The monk then argues for the Cross's

[113] See Jane Idleman Smith, 'Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature', *History of Religions* 19, no. 3 (1980): 224–236; Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1981), esp. 49, n. 54; Roberto Tottoli, 'Sleep', *EQ* 5 (2006): 60–63. On possible traces of Christian hypnopsychism in the Qurʾān (a subject that cannot be addressed here), see Tommaso Tesei, 'The *barzakh* and the Intermediate State of the Dead in the Quran', in *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 31–55.

[114] Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-mushtahir bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-l-Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 32 vols. (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr, 1401/1981), 16:683.

[115] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Fahmī ʿAdlī Sirjānī and Muḥammad Anīs ʿIyāda (Cairo: Maktabat Jumhūriyyat Miṣr, n.d.), 59–58.

[116] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 22–25.

[117] Anonymous, *Drāšā*, 231.

correspondence to nature as indicated by the four quarters of the earth, the four elements, the four rivers of paradise in Gen 2:4–10, and the four evangelists.[118] Drawing on his Church's Christology, the monk further argues that it is not the gold, silver, or wood that the Christians worship, but 'our Lord, God the Word, who dwelt in the temple (i.e., the human body) from us, and dwells in this sign of victory'.[119]

These strategies were developed in later works of Syriac and Christian Arabic apologetics and systematic theologies. Theodore Bar Kōnī reasons that the Cross is a likeness (*dmūṯā*) of Christ with whom God united, pointing out that Christians venerate it as the Jews revere the Ark of the Covenant. He further states that Christ's resurrection was wrought by the Cross and the apostles' miracles (*'āṯwān*) were worked through it.[120] Drawing on his Church's Christology, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī explains that because Christ's humanity was a veil (*ḥijāb*) worn by God, it is fitting that the instrument of his death be venerated, much in the way that one might kiss the hoof of the king's horse and honour the earth beneath him, instead of the king's shoes and robe.[121] Moreover, al-Baṣrī asks why kissing the Cross should be considered any more controversial than the Muslim custom of kissing the Black Stone in Mecca.[122] His Jacobite contemporary Abū Rā'iṭa also references Muslim practice when describing the Cross as an object to which prayer is orientated, likening it to the *qibla* employed in mosques.[123] After offering Old Testament typologies of the Cross, ʿAmr ibn Mattā in his *Kitāb al-majdal* affirms sacred tradition by recounting Constantine's vision and Helena's discovery.[124] He later states that the Cross is a representation (*mumaththal*) of Christ's victory over death, and thus the object of its veneration is not its gold, silver, or iron.[125]

In a discussion of the Cross's signification in nature, the Melkite bishop Sulaymān al-Ghazzī (fl. eleventh–thirteenth centuries?) cites not only the four cardinal directions but also a microcosmic theory of man as substance (*jawhar*), mass (*jirm*), living (*ḥayy*), and breathing (*mutanaffis*), with the intellect (*ʿaql*) at its centre.[126]

[118] Anonymous, *Drāšā*, 230. This argument owes much to the influence of Ephrem's natural theology, as observed by Reinink, 'The Veneration of Icons', 337, no. 31 *apud* Pierre Yousif, 'St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, and the Cross (Hymns on Faith, no. 18)', *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978): 52–62 and Karim, 'Symbols of the Cross'. For further examples of the Cross representing the four corners of the world in the poetry of Ephrem, see also Taeke Jansma, 'The Establishment of the Four Quarters of the Universe in the Symbol of the Cross: A Trace of an Ephraemic Conception in the Nestorian Inscription of Hsi-an fu?' *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975): 204–209.

[119] Anonymous, *Drāšā*, 232.

[120] Bar Kōnī, *Liber scholiorum (Seert)*, 2:269–270 (text); idem, *Scholies (Séert)*, 2:200–201 (trans.). Cf. Griffith, 'Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*', 173.

[121] ʿAmmār al-Basrī, *Kitāb al-burhān*, 87. Cf. Brock, 'Clothing Metaphors', 20.

[122] Al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-burhān*, 88.

[123] Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa, *Ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-thālūth al-muqaddas*, in Sandra Toenies Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'iṭa* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 132 (text), 133 (trans.).

[124] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 141r–141v.

[125] Ibn Mattā, *Kitāb al-majdal*, 149v.

[126] Sulaymān al-Ghazzī, *al-Maqālāt al-lāhūtiyya al-nashriyya*, ed. Néophytos Edelby, 3 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Būlusiyya, 1986), 3:111–112.

A less cosmological approach is taken in Elias II ibn al-Muqlī's *Uṣūl al-dīn*. In line with earlier apologists he argues that that 'Cross is dignified for its signification, not for its own sake' (*yukarramu li-maʿnāhi lā li-dhātihi*).[127] Elsewhere in the same chapter he compares the veneration of the Cross to that of the Black Stone, adding that Christians wear the Cross in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice in the way that Jews pull cords on the sides of their gowns in remembrance of God's commandments.[128] In addition to rejecting idolatry, Ibn al-Muqlī briefly recounts two legends of the Cross's discovery: one involving Protonike, the wife of the Roman emperor Claudius,[129] and another involving the more familiar Helena legend, the latter of which is said to be the reason for the Cross's feast day on the thirteenth of Aylūl.[130] Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn's apology of the Cross rehearses many of the aforementioned strategies. These include comparing the kissing of the Cross to the kissing of the king's carpet, done out of respect for the king, not to the carpet itself.[131] He also repeats Ibn al-Muqlī's words about the true object of the Cross's veneration (*yukarramu li-maʿnāhi lā li-dhātihi*), refers to the Cross as *qibla*, and compares it to the Black Stone.[132] In addition to these statements, Bar Malkōn claims that Peter was the first to incorporate the Cross into Christian worship, thus situating the practice in apostolic tradition.[133]

It is clear, therefore, that a panoply of discourses had emerged by the thirteenth century to explain, defend, and rationalize the cult of the Cross in the Islamicate world. Central themes of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apology of the Cross in the *Durra* are God's providential power over creation and the transcendence of His essence. After

[127] Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 2:306–307.

[128] Ibn al-Muqlī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 2:309–310.

[129] While the story of Protonike's discovery of the Cross shares some affinities with the Helena legend, the former is set in the first century and involves a fictional character (the emperor Claudius is not known to have had a wife named Protonike). On a visit to Jerusalem, the empress is asked by James, the head of the Church there, to relieve the Christians of Jewish persecution. Obliging his request, Protonike orders the Jews to submit the location of Golgotha and the True Cross. After the location of the tomb is revealed, her daughter falls ill and instantly dies. Upon finding three crosses there (one belonging to Christ and two to the thieves), Protonike places each on the body of her daughter until she is revived—and thus the True Cross is recognized. This narrative often occurs in recensions separate from the Helena legend, usually as part of the Edessene *Doctrina Addai*. Jan Willem Drijvers ('The Protonike Legend, the Doctrina Addai and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa', *Vigiliae christianae* 51 [1997]: 298–315) has speculated that the early Edessene Church sought to bolster the city's importance by formulating its own *inventio crucis*. For Ibn al-Muqlī (*Uṣūl al-dīn*, 2:304–305), however, the Protonike tradition and Helena legend are equally authoritative; he states that once Protonike had established the True Cross, it was hidden again by the Jews, only to be rediscovered four centuries later by Helena. This harmonization is also found in Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *Puššāqā d-(ʾ)rāzānāyāṭā*, Birmingham, Mingana Syr. 215, 1v–59r, here 2v–8r. I am grateful to Kelli Bryant for this information.

[130] Ibn al-Muqlī, 2:304–305.

[131] Bar Malkōn, *Maqāla fī radd ʿalā al-yahūd wa-l-muslimīn*, 159. Cf. Herman G.B. Teule, 'Išoʿyahb bar Malkon's Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons', in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 157–170, here 163.

[132] Bar Malkōn, *Maqāla fī al-radd ʿalā al-yahūd wa-l-muslimīn*, 160–161; Teule, 'Išoʿyahb bar Malkon's Treatise', 165–164.

[133] Bar Malkōn, *Maqāla fī al-radd ʿalā al-yahūd wa-l-muslimīn*, 161; Teule, 'Išoʿyahb bar Malkon's Treatise', 164, n. 29–30 for the sources of this tradition.

establishing biblical testimonies in support of the Cross (discussed above), he states that the apostles established its sign 'as a *qibla* of worship, so that worshipers remember the truths of the Church and persist in obedience to what is necessary for universal salvation'.[134] By gazing on the Cross (*naẓar ilā al-ṣalīb*), ʿAbdīshōʿ continues, the worshipper is reminded of the necessitating cause (*al-sabab al-mūjib*) of the Incarnation, which is God's compassion for humankind (*raʾfat Allāh bihim*).[135] In line with so many earlier apologists, ʿAbdīshōʿ affirms that Christians do not venerate the man-made form (*al-shakl al-maṣnūʿ*) of the Cross. Rather, it is Christ's humanity that is venerated on account of its conjunction with the divinity (*li-ttiṣālihi bi-l-lāhūt*), the worship of which is obligatory and necessary (*farḍ wājib*).[136] In order to drive this point home, ʿAbdīshōʿ admonishes those failing to venerate the Cross with anything other than *this* in mind.[137]

Another strategy that emerges in ʿAbdīshōʿ's apology of the Cross is the argument that the true object of the Cross's veneration can be inferred from the grammatical structure of the word 'Cross' itself. This first occurs in the *Pearl*:

> We worship Christ's humanity for the sake of God who is in him (*meṭṭol ʾAlāhā d-ḇeh*). Thus, through the Cross we worship God the saviour, because 'Cross' (*ṣlīḇā*, i.e., 'the crucified one') is a term (*šmā*) for Christ, equivalent to 'killed' (*qṭīlā*) and 'worshipped' (*sḡīḏā*). This appellation does not apply to the wood, silver, or bronze [of the Cross].[138]

A similar statement occurs in the *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements*, in which ʿAbdīshōʿ expounds the Cross's liturgical function. Once again, the word 'Cross' is said to be 'a designation (*šmā*) for Christ, as in "crucified" (*zqīpā*) and "killed" (*qṭīlā*)'.[139] The argument drawn from the passive participial form of the root *ṣ-l-b* also finds

[134] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 46. [135] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 48–50.

[136] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 55–58. The author refrains from mentioning the source of the accusation that Christians venerate the manufactured form of the Cross. He instead states that it is 'as a [certain] group supposes' (*ka-mā ẓanna qawm*).

[137] See, for instance, *Durra*, ch. 9, §56: 'God forbid that any among the Christians should believe that [veneration is to the manufactured form of the Cross]. Rather, they (*scil.* Christians) denounce as unbelievers (*yukaffirūna*) those who say or believe it'; and §§ 61–62: 'Were prostration (*sujūd*) [. . .] to the Cross not performed with this intention, it would be a sin by those doing it and unbelief (*kufr*) by those saying it'.

[138] *Pearl*, 47.

[139] Bar Brīkhā, *Ṭukkās dīnē*, 128 (text), 129 (trans.). Here, ʿAbdīshōʿ source seems to have been the *Scholion* of Theodore bar Kōnī, as implied by his statement, *ʾāmar mārē ʾeskōlyōn d-maḵtḇānā* ('says the author of the *Scholion*'). However, the argument about the Cross does not occur in the version of this work edited by Scher (cited elsewhere in this study). If ʿAbdīshōʿ does indeed mean Theodore bar Kōnī's *Scholion*, then the only possible source is the so-called Urmia recension of this work. Here, the author states: 'When we call Christ (*mšīḥā*) "our Lord," it is because he was anointed (*ʾeṯmšaḥ*) by the Holy Spirit; "saviour" (*pārōqā*) because he saved (*praq*) us due to [his] receiving lordship over all; and "crucified" (*ṣlīḇā*) because he was placed upon a cross (*ʾeṣṭleḇ*)'. Theodore bar Kōnī, *Théodore bar Koni. Livre des Scholies (recension d'Urmiah)*, ed. and tr. Robert Hespel, CSCO 447–448 (Leuven: Peeters, 1983), 141 (text), 101–102 (trans.).

expression in the Arabic of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra*: ʿ*ṣalīb* is a designation (*ism*) for *maṣlūb*, like *qāṭil* for *maqṭūl*, which is Christ who by his Crucifixion provided us true salvation'.[140] After making this statement, ʿAbdīshōʿ appeals to Jewish and Muslim practice by asserting—in accordance with earlier apologists—that veneration of the Cross is no more idolatrous than prostration towards the Temple Mount and the Kaʿba, since any reasonable person would know that worship towards these objects is 'not to stone, clay, and what is man-made (*mā huwā ṣunʿat al-bashar*) but to the Lord of those edifices' (*li-rabb tilka al-abniya*). This, he reasons, is the true purpose of Christians 'concerning their use of the Cross as a *qibla* in their worship'.[141]

In addition to defending the veneration of the Cross against charges of idolatry, ʿAbdīshōʿ affirms the sacred traditions underpinning the practice. Towards the end of the *Pearl*'s section on the Cross, he reminds us that the apostles performed miracles by this sign and completed the mysteries by it (*[ʾ]rāzē ʿedtānāyē b-hānā nīšā gmarw*).[142] ʿAbdīshōʿ elaborates on this in the *Durra*, stating that many miracles were worked by the Cross, chief among them the healing of the sick by the apostles, who would only cure the afflicted after making its sign and pronouncing the name of the Trinity (*ism al-thālūth*).[143] Moreover, ʿAbdīshōʿ lists priestly ordination, baptism, and the Eucharist as having been consecrated through the Cross by the apostles. At the end of his narration of the Helena legend, ʿAbdīshōʿ drives home its relevance to the religious life of the Church, stating that the celebration of the feast day marking the Cross's discovery is obligatory for all Christians, having been decreed by the 318 bishops at the Council of Nicaea who 'established the orthodox creed' (*qarrarū al-amāna al-saḥīḥa*).[144]

In Chapter 3 of this study we discussed ʿAbdīshōʿ's use of empirical and teleological demonstrations of God's existence and Trinitarian attributes. Similar arguments are also brought to bear in the *Durra*'s exposition of the Cross. The first is what ʿAbdīshōʿ refers to as the 'soundness of multiplication' (*ṣiḥḥat ḥisāb al-ḍarb*) using lines (*khuṭūṭ*), which are crossed over one another horizontally and vertically to produce a result in the form of intersecting dots (*nuqaṭ*).[145] The premise here is that any amount multiplied by any number will yield a quantity of dots greater than itself—with the exception of the number 1, which produces a single dot when multiplied by itself. ʿAbdīshōʿ illustrates this himself with figures, reconstructed below, in Figure 5.1, as they appear in all available manuscripts.[146]

[140] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 59. See also *Farāʾid*, ch. 9, § 3 for an almost identical statement in what little has been preserved of the work's chapter on the Cross.
[141] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 65–68.
[142] *Pearl*, 48. Cf. ibid., 33: 'The sign of the life-giving Cross . . . is completion and consecration of all the mysteries' (*šumlāyā [h]w d-ʾ]rāzē kolhōn wa-mšamlyānā*).
[143] *Durra*, ch. 9 § 71. [144] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 108. [145] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 111–112.
[146] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 112–114.

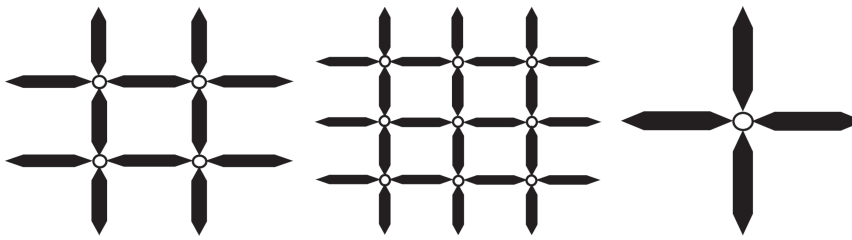

Figure 5.1 The unity of the Cross

Thus, the result from the third figure from the right is the form of the Cross (*ṣūrat al-ṣalīb*).[147] To the best of my knowledge, this method does not occur in any earlier Christian Arabic or Syriac discussion of the Cross. However, the notion that the diligent searcher could be led to a better understanding of God through numbers features prominently in the thought of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the anonymous fraternity of philosophers active in tenth-century Baghdad mentioned in the previous chapter. A pertinent example of their reception in the Syriac Christian milieu comes from a treatise on the alpha-numerological interpretation of the Arabic alphabet by Ignatius bar Wahīb (d. 1332), a Syrian Orthodox monk active in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn around the turn of the fourteenth century. In his introduction to this work, Ignatius cites the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ ('Sincere Brethren') as being among the first major authorities to uncover the hidden meanings of numbers and letters.[148] In their Neopythagorean metaphysics of numbers, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ taught that the number one can be expressed in two ways: in the literal sense (*bi-l-ḥaqīqa*), in that one is indivisible and cannot be duplicated; and in the metaphorical sense (*bi-l-majāz*), insofar as an object is one in quantity but divisible by nature. Thus the true sense of one 'is that in which there is nothing else but itself, insofar as it is one' (*min ḥaythu huwa wāḥid*).[149] A further principle of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's numerical scheme is that the number one, due to its stability and indivisibility, preserves the specific identity of each of its multiples—including itself—and for that reason is referred to as the generator (*munshiʾ*) of numbers, reflecting a monotheistic conception of divinity.[150] ʿAbdīshōʿ's conception of oneness

[147] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 114.

[148] Ignatius bar Wahīb, *Taʾwīl al-ḥurūf al-ʿarabiyya*, Mosul, Syriac Archdiocese 63, 60r–99v, here 62r. This manuscript has been digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (project number ASOM 63). A critical and edition and translation is forthcoming from Samuel Noble.

[149] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Arithmetic and Geometry: an Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 1–2*, ed. and tr. Nader El-Bizri (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2012), 11 (text), 67 (trans.).

[150] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Arithmetic and Geometry*, 27 (text), 75 (trans,). See also Yves Marquet, *Les 'Frères de la pureté' pythagoriciens de l'islam: la marque du pythagorisme dans la rédaction des épîtres des Iḫwan aṣ-Ṣafâ'* (Paris: Edidit, 2006), 171. On ancient antecedents, see Iamblichus, *The Theology of*

follows much the same logic, except that in demonstrating this premise he adds that God's absolute unity can be observed in cruciform, which in turn necessitates the Cross's veneration:

> The real 'One' (*al-aḥad al-ḥaqq*) is God (may He be exalted) who possesses oneness in essence, while those other than Him do so only metaphorically (*bi-l-majāz*). If this is the case, then it is necessary for all people to glorify the shape (*shakl*) from which we know the oneness of the Creator (may He be exalted), and to make it a *qibla* for themselves in their prayers so that none among them forget Him.[151]

In his second teleological demonstration of the Cross, ʿAbdīshōʿ discusses the significance of the number four as reflected in the arrangement of nature. Here he lists the following fourfold (*rubāʿiyyāt*) phenomena from the created order:

i. The four elements, being earth, water, fire and air;
ii. The movements of the celestial sphere which produce four seasons, being spring, summer, autumn, and winter;
iii. The four simple qualities, being hot, cold, humid, and dry;
iv. The four compound qualities, being hot-humid, hot-dry, cold-humid, and cold-dry;
v. The four humours, being blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm;
vi. The four humoral imbalances, being sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic;[152]
vii. The four animal ages, being childhood, youth, maturity, and old age;
viii. The four cardinal directions, being east, west, south, and north;
ix. The four characteristics of the celestial sphere, being sphericity, luminosity, impenetrability (*jalādat al-jism*), and speed.[153]

The fourfold nature of this scheme is closely linked to the idea that the workings of the human body reflect the movements of the heavens and thus constitutes a

Arithmetic: On the Mystical, Mathematical and Cosmological Symbolism of the First Ten Numbers, tr. Robin Waterfield (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1988), 35. Here, the late antique Pythagorean Iamblichus (d. 330 CE) likens the number one to the Monad because it preserves the specific identity of the number it is multiplied with, which he believes to be 'the disposition of divine, not human, nature'. Later in the same treatise, he states that the Monad is the 'artificer' and 'modeller', since it is the foundation of all numbers, and thus 'resembles God' (ibid., 37–38).

[151] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 115–116.

[152] On this and the preceding three phenomena, postulated by Hippocratic–Galenic medicine, see Peter E. Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 43 ff.

[153] *Durra*, ch. 9, §§ 118–123.

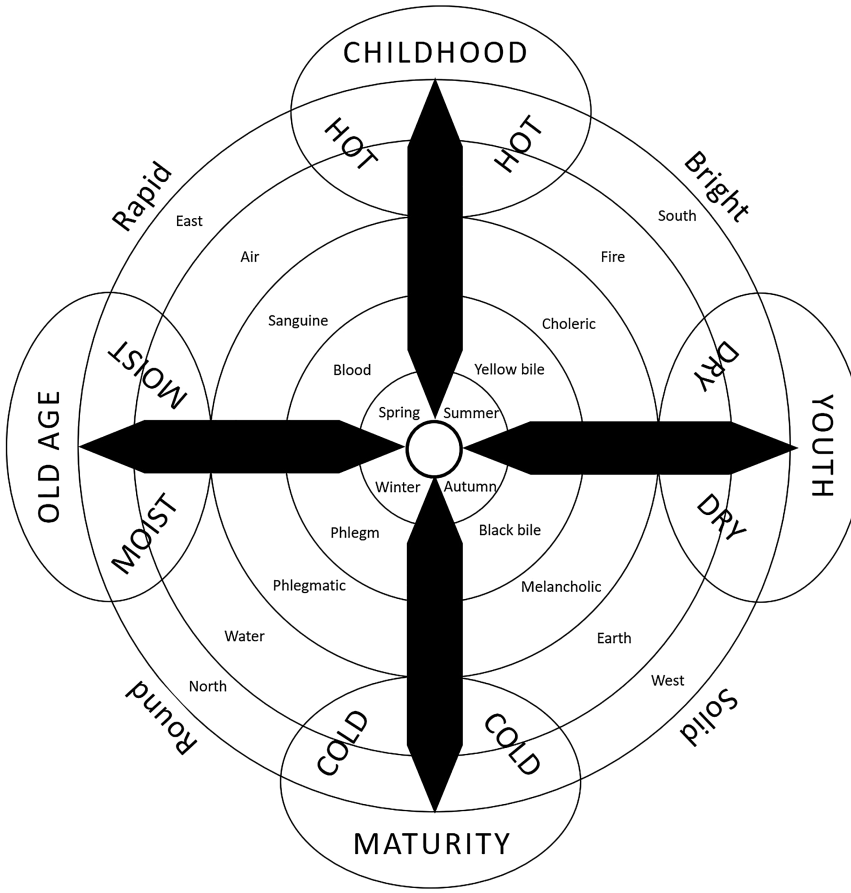

Figure 5.2 The cosmological significance of the Cross. Note inversion of cardinal directions. I have done this to represent air and fire's upward inclination and earth and water's downward inclination (according to ancient principles of elemental motion).

microcosm of the created order—a principle which had become heavily integrated into cosmological theories in the pre-modern Islamicate world.[154] From this worldview, ʿAbdīshōʿ once again infers the image of the Cross. Although not represented in figural form by ʿAbdīshōʿ himself (unlike in Figure 5.1), I have illustrated it here in Figure 5.2.

Theories of the Cross's significance in nature were by no means novel by ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, as we noted earlier in this chapter. We also observed in

[154] The idea that man and nature are connected at all levels on the model of micro- and macrocosm is central to an influential work of cosmology and hermetica known as the *Sirr al-asrār* (ca. ninth century), attributed to Apollonius of Tyana; see Ursula Weisser, *Das 'Buch über das Geheimnis der Schöpfung' von Pseudo-Apollonios von Tyana* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 94, 96, 176, 182, 185. For this principle in Greco-Arabic medicine, see Pormann and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, 43.

Chapter 3 that theories of micro- and macrocosm belonged to a philosophical idiom inherited from Greek thought and shared between Muslims and Christians. One example noted earlier was Sulaymān al-Ghazzī's microcosmic presentation of the Cross. Johannes van den Heijer and Paolo de Spisa have compared al-Ghazzī's approach to that in Epistle 26 of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', particularly its section on resemblances (*mushābahāt*) between the composition of the body and the four elements. More germane to our discussion is part 5 of the Sincere Brethren's first epistle (on arithmetic). Building on the same Neopythagorean model discussed above, the author of the epistle states that the number four corresponds to the arrangement of natural things that were created by God, hence the existence of fourfold phenomena (*murabbaʿāt*) such as the elements, directions, seasons, temperaments, humours, and sublunar phenomena such as minerals, plants, animals.[155] In line with earlier thinkers, ʿAbdīshōʿ goes a step further by asserting that a unified knowledge of creation is encapsulated in the form of the Cross: 'All of these things [in nature]', explains ʿAbdīshōʿ, 'were brought into being by God's power, and the shape (*shakl*) that generally indicates this is a cross [. . .]. Thus, it is incumbent on everyone to place it before their eyes (*nuṣba ʿaynihi*) [in worship].'[156]

5.3 Sounding Salvation: The Call to Prayer between *nāqūs* and *adhān*

So far we have noted throughout ʿAbdīshōʿ's exposition of the Cross a theological language that draws from both the Church's own sacred traditions and a theological lexicon common to Christians and Muslims. These have ranged from descriptions of the Cross as *qibla* to its signification in numerical and natural phenomena. We encounter a very similar strategy in ʿAbdīshōʿ's explanation of the Christian call to prayer. Central to his discussion is a repeated appeal to sacred tradition, namely the *Book of the Cave of Treasures*'s recasting of the biblical Flood narrative. As will soon become evident, ʿAbdīshōʿ employs this narrative as a typology for the Church as humankind's refuge from sin. While references to Islamic theology throughout his writings have so far been indirect, his use of one Islamic source in his discourse on the call to prayer is explicit. The source in question is a *ḥadīth* attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muḥammad, the first Shīʿī imam, and fourth of the 'Rightly Guided' caliphs. In this section I will demonstrate how ʿAbdīshōʿ once again negotiates aspects of what Marshall Hodgson described as

[155] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *On Arithmetic and Geometry*, 21 (text), 71 (trans.). Cf. Iamblichus, *The Theology of Arithmetic*, 59–16 for a similar enumeration of fourfold phenomena in nature.
[156] *Durra*, ch. 9, § 124.

a 'lettered tradition [...] naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims'.[157] ʿAbdīshōʿ does this to convince a Christian audience that the Church's traditional teaching regarding the call to prayer could be legitimated through a broader, non-Christian literary idiom.

5.3.1 From Liturgy to Apology

An early interpretation of the call to prayer as an exhortation to piety is found in a homily by Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), in which he likens the clapper to a trumpet (*qarnā*) that incites Christians to do battle with Satan (*qrāḇā d-ʿam Sāṭānā*).[158] While it is uncertain whether ʿAbdīshōʿ had knowledge of Jacob's homily, his discourse is similarly linked to humankind's struggle against sin. To better understand the background to ʿAbdīshōʿ's explanation of the clapper, we must first look to its liturgical context, since it is in liturgical commentaries that discussions about the call to prayer occur more frequently. The earliest of these do not appear apologetic in nature. An unedited liturgical commentary by the East Syrian Gabriel of Qaṭar (fl. early seventh century) tells us that the striking of the clapper symbolizes three trumpets (*tlāṯā qarnāṯā*) that conclude the singing of praise in the middle of the evening. The first trumpet signifies the coming of Christ in Mat 25:6 ('Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'), Mat 24:19 ('The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'), and 1 Thess 4:15 ('We who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep'). The second trumpet signifies Christ's victory over Satan. And the third trumpet signifies the resurrection of Christ and the raising of the dead on the Last Day.[159] West Syrian liturgical commentaries such as that by Moses bar Kepha's (d. 903) also offered spiritual interpretations of the clapper, echoing Jacob of Serugh's description of it as a trumpet call against evil.[160]

[157] Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:58.

[158] Jacob of Serugh, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, ed. Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryani, 2 vols. (Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies—Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017), 2:552. An earlier recension with a differently worded second half is found in idem, *ʿAl nāqōšā w-meṭṭol zuhhārā da-ṣlōṭā*, Charfeh, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Library 212 (*olim* 38), 191v–192r, also mentioned in Herman G.B. Teule, 'A Fifteenth Century Spiritual Anthology from the Monastery of Mar Ḥannanyā', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 49 (1997): 79–102, here 91.

[159] Gabriel of Qaṭar, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, London, Or. 3336, 114r–114v. For a summary of contents, see Sebastian P. Brock, 'Gabriel of Qatar's Commentary on the Liturgy', *Hugoye* 6, no. 2 (2009), 197–248.

[160] Richard Hugh Connolly and Humphrey William Codrington (ed. and tr.), *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy by George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bar Kēphā: Together with the Syrac Anaphora of St James and a Document Entitled The Book of Life* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), 17 (text), 25 (trans.). For Moses bar Kepha's reliance on earlier sources, see Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 26.

In later commentaries the figure of Noah is often invoked to explain the clapper's intrinsic meaning. The East Syrian *Ktāḇā d-ʾaḇāhāṯā* ('Book of the Fathers')—a work of ecclesiology and liturgy spuriously attributed to the catholicos Simon bar Ṣabbāʿī (martyred under the Sassanian king Shapur) but far likelier a medieval composition[161]—tells us that Noah struck wood against wood (*nāqēš [h]wā qaysā ʿal qaysā*) to announce chastisements to come (*mēʾṯīṯhēn d-mardwāṯā*) and to call humankind to repentance (*taybūṯā*).[162] ʿAbdīshōʿ himself dedicates a section of his *Order of Ecclesiastical Judgements* to the use of the clapper in the performance of ecclesiastical offices:

> The clapper—or the proclaimer that cries, 'Glory to God on high!'—reminds us to run towards the call of refuge (*qrāytā d-ḇēṯ gawsā*). It is said that it was handed down by Adam, who announced the raising up of worship to God in the *Cave of Treasures*. Similarly, Noah struck it so that they would be gathered to the place of refuge, the Ark, without drowning in the waters of the flood of sinners.[163]

The legend of the clapper's origins in the *Cave of Treasures* was also incorporated into later Syriac chronicles such as the *Anonymous Chronicle to 1234*,[164] as well as the Arabic Christian Melkite chronicles of Saʿīd ibn Biṭrīq and the anonymous *Kitāb al-majāll* ('Book of Scrolls').[165] It is no surprise, then, to find reference to the Noah legend in the form of a marginal note in a manuscript of a Copto-Arabic nomocanon attributed to al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (copied in 1355). The author of the note reports that the first to begin the practice of striking the clapper was Noah, who did so to gather the craftsmen (*ṣunnāʿ*) during the Ark's construction, according to unnamed historians (*muʾarrikhūn*).[166]

[161] On the dating of this text, see introduction to Ps.-Simon bar Ṣabbāʿī, *Le Livre des Pères ou Ketabha dh'Abhahata (extrait de la Science Catholique, quatrième année, n^os 5 et 6. Mai, juin 1890)*, tr. Jean Parisot (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1890), 37–40.

[162] Ps.-Simon bar Ṣabbāʿē, *Ktāḇā d-ʾaḇāhāṯā w-ʿal hawnē ʿellāyē w-ʿal ʿedtā d-ḇa-šmayyā*, Mardin, Chaldean Cathedral 334, 26r–26v (text) (digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, project number: CCM 334); idem, *Le Livre des Pères*, 35 (trans.).

[163] *Ṭukkās dīnē*, 126 (text), 127 (trans.).

[164] Anonymous, *Chronicon ad A.C. 1234*, 1:41 (text), 3:29 (trans.).

[165] For the Flood narrative and Noah's use of the clapper in these two works, see Ibn Biṭrīq, *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, 25; anonymous, *Kitāb al-majāll*, in Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Studia Sinaitica No.VIII. Apocrypha Arabica* (London: C.J. Clay, 1901), 24 (text), 23 (trans.). Ibn Biṭrīq's reliance on the *Cave of Treasures* has been discussed by Uriel Simonsohn, 'Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq', *CMR* 2 (2011): 224–233, here 228–229. See also the Arabic recension of the *Cave of Treasures*; anonymous, *Die Schatzhöhle*, ed. and tr. Carl Bezold, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1883, 1888), 75–77 (text), 22–24 (trans.).

[166] Al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Majmūʿ min al-qawānīn al-bīʿa*, London, Or. 1331, 44r, discussed in Zayyāt, *al-Diyārāt al-naṣrāniyya*, 93–94. For details about this unedited work (not to be confused with a better-known nomocanon by al-Muʾtaman's brother, al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl), see Charles Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Longmans, 1894), 18.

By the Crusader period, we begin to see a more controversial use of the tradition, particularly where the Muslim call to prayer is concerned. In his liturgical commentary, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī quotes the above-mentioned *mēmrā* by Jacob of Serugh, declaring, 'What will the enemies of the cross (*bʿeldḇāḇē da-ṣlīḇā*) and those who forbid the clapper in their lands say against the word of the Doctors?'[167] Dionysius then invokes Noah's use of the clapper from the *Cave of Treasures* tradition, stating a clear preference for the instrument against all other means of calling the faithful to prayer. This includes the *adhān*, to which he alludes in the following passage:

> From where have you learned to strike the clapper in church? We say that the following is written in many histories: God commanded Noah to construct an ark and fashion a clapper. He struck it in the morning and the workers would gather to build the ark; [then] at midday to break for food; [then] in the evening to retire from work. Moreover, we say that the clapper was fashioned from wood because it reaches the hearing better than the human voice (*qālā d-ḇarnāšā*) and summons people to prayer.[168]

A similar Church–Ark typology plays a central role in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra*, and to a lesser extent in his *Farāʿid*. Both works begin by stating that the use of the clapper is rooted in prophetic tradition. The *Durra* sets out the premise that the Church is modelled on the Ark of Noah (*al-safīna al-nūḥiyya*), explaining that it is necessary that its callers be made silent (*yujʿala munādīhā ṣāmitan*), by the inspiration of 'The Possessor of All' (*mālik al-mulk*),[169] a Qurʾānic stylization for God.[170] Here he relates an 'ancient account' (*ʿatīqa min al-akhbār*) that the biblical patriarch was instructed to fashion a clapper (*nāqūs*) from wood, and to strike it in order to fulfil two objectives. The first was to assemble his workmen during the Ark's construction and to signal the times of meals.[171] Once the Ark was complete and the flood underway, the purpose of the clapper was to bring people to safety from the flood, while Noah called out, 'Whosoever enters is saved! Whosoever enters is saved!' (*man jāʾa najā, man jāʾa najā*).[172] With greater concision, ʿAbdīshōʿ states in the *Farāʾid* that, according to an ancient tradition (*sunna qadīma*), Noah struck the clapper after Adam at the completion of the Ark, saying, 'Whosever enters is saved!'[173]

However, in the *Durra* ʿAbdīshōʿ writes at greater length about how this narrative relates to issues of repentance, ritual piety, and obedience:

[167] Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *Dionysius bar Salibi. Expositio liturgiae*, ed. and tr. Jérôme Lambert, CSCO 13–14 (Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1955), 14–15 (text), 42 (trans.).
[168] Bar Ṣalībī, *Expositio liturgiae*, 15 (text), 42–43 (trans.).
[169] *Durra*, ch. 16, §§ 11–12.
[170] See Alexander D. Knysh, 'Possession and Possessions', *EQ* 5 (2004): 184–187, esp. 184.
[171] *Durra*, ch. 16, §§ 15–16.
[172] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 17–18.
[173] *Farāʾid*, ch. 12, § 29.

> Just as those entering the Ark set themselves aside from sinners and are saved from drowning, so those entering the Church have set themselves aside from the unjust sons of the world who are immersed in oceans of sin and obscenity, saving themselves from drowning due to the God of Heaven's displeasure.
>
> Just as He saved those entering the Ark from the actual drowning (*al-gharq al-maḥsūs*) and destroys those who insist on rebellion by transgressing the law, so does He save those entering houses of worship during the metaphorical flood (*al-gharq al-maʿqūl*) and destroys those who persist in the belief that there is no use in entering them.
>
> Just as in the beginning the Ark's clapper would incite [its craftsmen] to gather to carry out works (*li-l-maṣāliḥ*) and provide food, while in the end admonishing those unmindful of the destructive flood to enter the Ark, so too [. . .] does the clapper incite the faithful to meet, with pure intention, to carry out works of religious observance (*al-maṣāliḥ al-dīniyya*), and provides knowledge of the Lord's mysteries, strengthening [worshippers'] performance of divine obligations and bringing [them] closer to the holy presence.[174]

It is this interpretation that is given as rationale for the Church's adoption of the clapper. Like Bar Ṣalībī, ʿAbdīshōʿ is no less compromising in his preference for the clapper over other means of calling the faithful to prayer. After outlining the above tradition, he concludes: 'This is the reason for the use of the clapper to make known the times of prayer, without resorting to the cry of a caller or the *adhān* of the *muʾadhdhin*.'[175] Adopting a more combative tone, the *Farāʾiḍ*'s brief section on the call to prayer is concluded with a reference to critics who accuse Christians of resting their authority on dubious foundations, concluding: 'The striking of the clapper is not an innovation (*biḍʿa*) of the Christians, but an ancient tradition from the prophets.'[176]

5.3.2 For Whom the Clapper Claps: The Sermon of ʿAlī as Proof-Text

In ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme, and arguably in Bar Ṣalībī's, the figure of Noah serves to firmly ground the clapper in prophetic tradition to make it worthy of Muslim esteem.[177] This now brings us to the second part of the *Durra*'s section on the clapper. In addition to its purported origins, we have observed its portrayal as an admonition to piety, exhorting the faithful to escape the spiritual deluge, just as Noah escaped the worldly deluge. This theme is elaborated upon when ʿAbdīshōʿ

[174] *Durra*, ch. 16, §§ 19–25. [175] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 27. [176] *Farāʾid*, §12, § 32.
[177] For Noah in the Islamic tradition, see B. Heller, 'Nūḥ', *EI²* 8 (1995): 108–109.

turns his attention to the meanings 'encapsulated in the number of its knocks and the scale of its strikes (*'adad naqarātihi wa-wazn ḍarabātihi*)'.[178] First, the sound made by the striking of this instrument is said to glorify God, expressing 'the Creator's oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), the power of His divinity, the majesty of His greatness, and the breadth of His power'.[179] Second, 'Abdīshō' continues, the clapper incites the hearer 'to yearn for God's forgiveness of us (*'alā al-raghba ilā Allāh fī musāmaḥatinā*)'.[180] It is here that 'Abdīshō' rests the authority of this statement on 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, whom our author refers to by name and even applies the salutation *raḍiya Allāh 'anhu* ('may God be pleased with him').[181]

The scene of 'Alī's 'interpretation' is set with a transmission line (*isnād*) of the narrators Muḥammad ibn Mūsā ibn al-Sukkarī, Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and Ibn al-Kawwā'.[182] The latter, a companion of 'Alī, reports that he was with the caliph (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) outside the city of al-Ḥīra when they heard the clapper being struck. Ibn al-Kawwā' proceeded to destroy it (*wa-ja'altu ut'isahu*), only to be rebuked by 'Alī for not knowing that the clapper was in fact 'speaking' (*yatakallamu*). After Ibn al-Kawwā' expresses puzzlement, 'Alī declares to him, 'By He Who split the seed and created the living being, each blow upon blow and knock upon knock does naught but provide a parable and offer knowledge (*illā wa-hiya taḥkī mathalan wa-tu'addī 'ilman*)'.[183] To this Ibn al-Kawwā' asks, 'So what does the clapper say?' 'Alī conveys his response with the following lines of poetry, which I also transliterate to illustrate its unique metre (of especial relevance below):

Subḥāna Llāhu ḥaqqan ḥaqqā
innā l-mawlā fardun yabqā
Yaḥkumu fīnā rifqan rifqā
lawlā ḥilmuku kunnā nashqā
Innā bi'nā dāran tabqā
wa-stawaṭannā dāran tafnā
Mā min ḥayyin fīhā yabqā
illā adnā minhu mawtā
Innā dunyā qad gharratnā
wa-staghwatnā wa-stawhatnā
Mā min yawmin yamḍī 'annā
illā yahdimu minnā ruknā
Tafnā l-dunyā qarnan qarnā
naqlan naqlan dafnan dafnā
Ya bnā l-dunyā mahlan mahlā
fa-zdad khayran tazdad ḥubbā

[178] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 28. [179] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 29. [180] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 31.
[181] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 32. [182] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 33. [183] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 35.

Yā mawlānā qad asrafnā
qad farraṭnā wa-tawānaynā
Ḥilmuka ʿannā qad ajzānā
fa-tadāraknā wa-ʿfu ʿannā

Glorified is god, truly, truly,
the Lord alone remains.
He judges us, gently, gently;
were it not for His kindness, we'd despair.
We've sold the abode everlasting
and settled in one that perishes.
None alive in there remains
except those closest to Him in death.
The world has deceived us,
seduced us, beguiled us.
Not a day passes us by
that doesn't chip away at our cornerstone.
The world perishes, generation after generation
moving, moving, burying, burying.
O son of the world, slowly, slowly,
do more good and reap more love.
O Lord, we've overstepped,
transgressed, grown lax.
Your mercy has rewarded us,
so put us in order[184] and forgive us![185]

ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra* is not the first work of Christian theology to cite the above verses. A very similar tradition is transmitted by an anonymous twelfth-century East Syrian commentary on the Creed (examined elsewhere in this study). In a section establishing the Christians' belief in divine unity (*tawḥīd*), the author of the commentary adduces several proofs from the reported sayings of not only the prophet Muḥammad but also his companions and the early caliphs.[186] As to the verses of poetry attributed to ʿAlī, they follow a rare convention in Classical Arabic prosody known as *daqq al-nāqūs*, 'the knock of the clapper', so called because it

[184] Gianazza's translation of 'abbiamo continuato senza interruzione' ('We have continued without interruption') is questionable. While the verb *tadāraka* can indeed have this sense, it can also mean 'to set right', 'rectify', or 'correct' (see Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon*, 3:874). And since the subsequent clause is *wa-ʿfu ʿannā* ('and forgive us'), it is likely that *tadāraknā* is intended here as an imperative. This reading certainly makes more sense considering the moralising theme that ʿAbdīshōʿ is attempting to drive home with this tradition, as will become clearer below.

[185] *Durra*, ch. 16, §§ 35–46.

[186] In addition to ʿAlī, these figures include the 'Righteously Guided' (*al-rāshidūn*) caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb; anonymous, *Sharḥ amānat ābā' majmaʿ Nīqīya*, 1:310–317.

was considered imitative of its sound and rhythm.[187] The scheme is based on a very regular pattern of eight syllables (two equally short ones per word) in each hemistich, illustrated by the anapaests *faʿlun faʿlun faʾlun faʿlun / faʿlun faʿlun faʿlun faʿlun*;[188] or in this case, *clap-clap, clap-clap, clap-clap, clap-clap / clap-clap, clap-clap, clap-clap, clap-clap*! Something of a rarity in Arabic poetry, there is some debate over the precise definition of *daqq al-nāqūs* within the traditional scheme of Classical Arabic metrics.[189] In most instances, however, variations of the above poem are cited in medieval works of Arabic prosody to illustrate the metre's structure.[190]

Also noteworthy is the monotonous rhythm of *daqq al-nāqūs*, which perhaps moved the prosodist Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Tibrīzī (d. 1109) to call it 'the dripping of the drainpipe' (*qaṭr al-mīzāb*).[191] Geert Jan van Gelder has noted the sense of gloom and foreboding that this metre evokes[192]—a mood that fits well with the moralizing character of ʿAbdīshōʿ's discourse. It is also worth mentioning that the lines of verse attributed to ʿAlī are representative of the '*ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt*' motif of pre-Islamic and Islamo-Arabic poetry associated with the late antique Arab Christian city of al-Ḥīra, which remained strong in the literary imagination and cultural memory of medieval writers.[193] These themes often

[187] For a recent and thorough discussion of *daqq al-nāqūs*'s typology and use in Classical Arabic poetry, see Geert Jan van Gelder, *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 2012), 108–123.

[188] I borrow here the metrical scheme's illustration by Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm fī ʿilm al-ʿarūḍ*, ed. Bahīja al-Ḥasanī (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Andalus, 1969), 232–233.

[189] For example, Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) considers this metre a type of *mutadārik*, the sixteenth metre of the Khalīlian system (added to al-Khalīl's original fifteen metres by al-Afkhash), as does ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Ibrahīm Zanjānī (d. 1261). See Zamakhsharī, *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm*, 232; ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Ibrahīm al-Zanjānī, *Miʿyār al-naẓẓār fī ʿulūm al-ashʿār*, ed. Muḥammad Rizq al-Khafājī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1991), 84. Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Tibrīzī (d. 1109), on the other hand, defines *daqq al-nāqūs* as a kind of *mutaqārib*, the fifteenth metre in the Khalīlian system; Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Tibrīzī, *al-Kāfī fī al-ʿarūḍ wa-l-qawāfī*, ed. al-Ḥassānī Ḥasan ʿAbdallāh, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānijī, 1415/1994), 138–140. Geert Jan van Gelder (*Sound and Sense*, 113), however, has recently called into question the definition of *daqq al-nāqūs* as a kind of *mutadārik*, or indeed as any kind of metre, arguing that 'traditional Arabic poetry is metrical, on a quantitative basis, which means that there is a *pattern of longs and shorts* – the word "pattern" is crucial here. There can be no pattern if there are only longs and shorts: there is merely a drab uniformity. A prosody based on quantity without distinction between quantities, short and long, is a contradiction in terms. The perfect uniformity, the regularity and the symmetry of LLLLLLLL run counter to the essence of Arabic prosody'.

[190] Zamaksharī (*al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm*, 232–233) cites only two verses of the poem, without attribution. Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Marzubānī (d. 1058) cites one Abū Mālik al-Ashajʿī as the tradition's narrator, with ʿAlī reciting a variant of the poem in al-Ḥīra after returning heavy-hearted from the Battle of Ṣiffīn (Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa-l-shāḥij*, ed. ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bint al-Shāṭiʾ, 2nd ed. [Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1404/1984], 192). Al-Tibrīzī also provides a poem attributed to ʿAlī though equally varied (al-Tibrīzī, *al-Kāfī fī al-ʿArūḍ*, 97). Muḥammad ibn ʿImrān al-Marzūbānī (d. 994) attributes a similar poem as Abū al-ʿAṭāhīya (d. 748) (Muḥammad ibn ʿImrān al-Marzūbānī, *al-Muwashshaḥ fī maʾākhidh al-ulamāʾ ʿalā al-shuʿarāʾ* [Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1343/1924], 256).

[191] Al-Tibrīzī, *al-Kāfī fī al-ʿarūḍ*, 97; cf. Zayyāt, *al-Dīyārāt al-naṣrāniyya*, 93, Van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 114.

[192] Van Gelder, *Sound and Sense,* 114, making an apt comparison between ʿAlī's meditation on the church clapper and the famous line from John Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions: Meditation XVII*, 'never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee'.

[193] See Adam Talib, 'Topoi and Topography in the Histories of al-Ḥīra', in *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, ed. Philip Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7–47.

reflect on the transience of this world and exhort the listener to contemplate life in the next. In one such narrative, set during a hunting expedition in al-Ḥīra, the Christian Arab poet ʿAdī ibn Zayd (d. 600) offers exhortatory 'interpretations' of the wisdom of certain inanimate objects, namely a tree and a gravestone, to the Lakhmid king al-Nuʿmān ibn Mundhir, moving the latter to convert to Christianity and become an ascetic.[194] Another account features the Lakhmid princess Hind bint Nuʿmān, who is said in the *Diyārāt* of al-Shābushtī to have recited poetry to the Umayyad governor Ḥajjāj ibn Yusuf during his visit to al-Ḥīra containing a message about the fleeting nature of this world and its pleasures.[195] ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's interpretation of the clapper's wisdom is featured in an earlier source, the *Dustūr al-maʿālim wa-l-ḥikam* of Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Salāma al-Quḍāʿī (d. 1062), though it contains notable divergences from the tradition cited by ʿAbdīshōʿ. For example, in al-Qudāʿī's version, no transmission line is given and ʿAlī's companion in al-Ḥīra is said to be al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar.[196] ʿAlī is known in such accounts for his renown in the art of Arabic eloquence and ascetic piety, occurring not only in works of medieval prosody but also Arabic wisdom literature, which transmits many of his aphorisms and spiritual teachings.[197]

We should also note that ʿAlī's verses on the clapper vary across several versions. The version contained in ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Durra* follows the same narrative structure as the one transmitted by the anonymous commentary on the Creed, but contains several divergences in the wording and order of its verses. This suggests that ʿAbdīshōʿ was not simply copying the use of a Muslim tradition from an earlier work of Christian apologetics. Given his broader interests in poetry and rhymed prose (observed elsewhere in this study), it is likely that ʿAbdīshōʿ was familiar with the broader literary traditions surrounding these verses and incorporated them into his own work because they spoke so fittingly of his Church's conception of piety. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that ʿAbdīshōʿ finds such an ideal interpreter of the church clapper in the figure of ʿAlī, given the emphasis placed on repentance and continence in his earlier narrative of the Flood. Once again, we have here what has been observed elsewhere in this study: a shared lettered tradition through which Christians could express key religious

[194] Quoted and discussed by Talib, 'Topoi and Topography', 131–132.

[195] Al-Shābushtī, *a-Diyārāt*, 238, 244, discussed by Kilpatrick, 'Monasteries through Muslim Eyes', 26.

[196] Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Salāma al-Quḍāʿī, *Dustūr maʿālim al-ḥikam wa-maʾthūr makārim al-shiyam min kalām amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, in Tahera Qutbuddin, *A Treasury of Virtues: Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of ʿAlī with One Hundred Proverbs Attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 152–155 (text and trans).

[197] Several studies have addressed the ethical and spiritual dimensions of ʿAlī's teachings. See, for example, Dimitri Gutas, 'Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101, no. 1 (1981): 49–86, esp. 60; Leonard Lewisohn, "Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib's Ethics of Mercy in the Mirror of the Persian Sufi Tradition', in *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam*, ed. Ali Lakhani (New York: IB Tauris, 2007), 109–146; Tahera Qutbuddin, 'The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qurʾan and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia', *Anuario de estudios medievales* 42, no. 1 (2012): 201–228.

concepts. Indeed, *ubi sunt* and *memento mori* motifs reminiscent of Arabic poetry are employed elsewhere in ʿAbdīshōʿ's theological oeuvre, namely his Syriac *Paradise*. The thirteenth discourse of this work comprises a heptasyllabic poem in which the author encounters a dead man in a graveyard. Issuing a warning from beyond the grave, the dead man incites the poet to reflect on the next life by performing acts of piety in the present.[198] While pietistic themes generally abound in pre-Islamic Christian literature,[199] such 'graveyard scenes' were also a feature of medieval Arabic verse on ascetic subjects (*zuhdiyyāt*).[200] Observe, for example, the affinities between ʿAlī's words about the vanities of this world (discussed earlier) and the dead man's admonition in ʿAbdīshōʿ's Syriac poem:

> Though my mouth is full of dust and ashes,
> it silently admonishes the wise
> not to boast of things of the world,
> for it is the destroyer of those who love it.
> Everything deserted me and betrayed me,
> everything fled from me suddenly,
> and death corrupted me down to the pit of perdition.
> Friends and kindred disowned me,
> wealth and possessions [forsook me],
> and apart from the loathsome tomb
> I did not possess a dwelling.[201]

And yet, despite such affinities, ʿAbdīshōʿ's engagement with ʿAlī's ethical teachings is not without its contentions. As ʿAbdīshōʿ himself points out, some unnamed Muslims accuse Christians of inventing the tradition 'to improve the image of the clapper (*li-taḥsīn amr al-nāqūs*)'.[202] However, he does not attempt to refute the claim with any evidence, perhaps suggesting that it is not Muslims he

[198] *Paradise*, 60–67.

[199] On *ubi sunt* themes in an eschatological poem attributed to Ephrem, see Carl H. Becker, 'Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere', in *Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte vornehmlich des Orients: Ernst Kuhn zum 70. Geburtstag am 7. Februar 1916* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1916), 87–105, here 93. Perhaps one of the best-known Christian stories featuring a conversation between the dead and living features in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (ca. fifth century). In it, the Egyptian desert father Macarius encounters a talking skull amidst the ruins of a pagan temple. This story inspired similar narratives in Syriac and Coptic; see Emmanouela Grypeou, 'Talking Skulls: On Some Personal Accounts of Hell and Their Place in Apocalyptic Literature', *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*, 20, no. 1 (2016): 109–126.

[200] See Nora Schmid, 'Abū l-ʿAtāhiya and the Versification of Disenchantment', in *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750–1000 C.E.*, ed. Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2014), 131–166, here 149–152. Numerous such scenes are recounted in poetic sayings attributed to the Muslim preacher and ascetic writer Ibn Abī Dunyā (d. 894). These are collected in ʿAbdallāh ibn Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-mawt wa-kitāb al-qubūr*, ed. Leah Kinberg (Acre: Maktabat ʿAbdallāh wa-Maṭbaʿat al-Surūjī li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1983).

[201] *Paradise*, 63 (text), with slight modifications from Winnet, *Paradise of Eden*, 72–73 (trans.).

[202] *Durra*, ch. 16, § 48.

seeks to convince but rather Christians who require assurance that their call to prayer is grounded in tradition. I am not aware of any such explicit objections to the authenticity of the tradition relating to ʿAlī and the clapper, but it should be noted that it does not occur in the *Nahj al-balāgha* of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 1016), a collection of ʿAlī's sermons and narrations which remains popular to this day.[203] Nor is it discussed by two of the *Nahj al-balāgha*'s best-known thirteenth-century commentators, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 1258) and Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. 1300).[204] A later version of it occurs in a fourteenth-century collection of ʿAlī's sayings attributed to Abū Muḥammad al-Daylamī, at the end of which a Christian monk converts to Islam after hearing that the imam's words came from the prophet Muḥammad, declaring that the Torah tells of a prophet who would explain what the clapper says (*yufassiru mā yaqūlu al-nāqūs*)[205]—thereby framing ʿAlī's sermon as an exhortation to Islamic conversion rather than a general reflection on piety. Similarly, in al-Qudāʿī's version, ʿAlī states that none can know what the clapper says 'but a prophet, his staunchest supporter, or his legatee' (*illā nabī aw ṣiddīq aw walī nabī*).[206] As for other Muslim narratives featuring ʿAlī, the *Manāqib amīr al-muʾminīn* of the Shīʿī traditionist Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kūfī (fl. tenth century) reports one instance in which Muḥammad praises ʿAlī's spiritual perfection by warning him against Muslims who might preserve the dirt on which he trod and venerate it in the manner of the Christians, implying that such practices be viewed with suspicion.[207] Moreover, a legal treatise by the Egyptian jurist Taqī al-Din al-Subkī (d. 1355) invokes a tradition mentioned by al-Ṭabarī that during his caliphate, ʿAlī banished the Christian population from Kūfa and forced them to settle in al-Ḥīra—cited as justification for the strict application of the *dhimma* where the building and repair of churches are concerned.[208]

Whether or not ʿAbdīshōʿ was aware of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's purported antagonisms towards Christians cannot be known for certain. However, there is evidence to suggest that the figure of ʿAlī occupied an important position in the Church of the East's cultural memory of early Islamic rule. We learn from the

[203] For a general overview, together with references to its corpus of commentaries, see Moktar Djebli, 'Nahj al-Balagha', *EI*² 7 (1993): 904.

[204] See ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Hibat Allāh ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, 10 vols. (Baghdad: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1427/2007); Maytham ibn ʿAlī al-Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿĀlam al-Islāmī, 1981).

[205] Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb al-munjī man ʿamila bihā min alīm al-ʿiqāb*, ed. Hāshim Mīlānī, 2 vols. (Tehran: Dār al-Uswa, 1375/1996) 2:252–253.

[206] al-Quḍāʿī, *Dustūr maʾālim*, 154 (text), 155 (trans.).

[207] Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kūfī, *Manāqib al-imām amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maḥmūdī, 3 vols. (Qom: Majmaʿ Iḥyāʾ al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1412/1991), 1:251, 459, 494, 2:215.

[208] Seth Ward, 'Construction and Repair of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic Law: A Treatise by Taqī al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Kāfī al-Subkī' (PhD diss., Yale University, 1984), 184–185. For the tradition itself, see Seth Ward, 'A Fragment from an Unknown Work by al-Ṭabarī on the Tradition "Expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula (and the Lands of Islam)"', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53, no. 3 (1990): 407–420, esp. 417.

historiographical tradition of the Church of the East that an East Syrian bishop named Mār Emmeh aided the seventh-century Arab conquest of Mosul and was rewarded with a letter of protection from ʿAlī.[209] Echoes of this tradition can be found in the twelfth-century commentary on the Nicene Creed; in addition to ʿAlī's sermon on the clapper (discussed above), the author mentions that ʿAlī commanded the *jizya* be extracted from Christians so that 'their blood and their property is like ours' (*li-yakūna damuhum ka-dimāʾinā wa-amwāluhim ka-amwālinā*)'[210]—a tradition that is recounted in later Muslim sources such as Ibn Abī Ḥadīd's commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha*.[211] Such invocations of past caliphal authority were often used by Christian leaders to secure certain privileges and to foster better relations with Muslim rulers. Indeed, similar claims that ʿAlī accorded favourable treatment were made by Jewish and Armenian groups under Islamic rule.[212] In any case, while the purpose of ʿAlī's sayings in the anonymous commentary on the Creed is to affirm Christianity's commitment to *tawḥīd* against Muslim critiques, ʿAbdīshōʿ incorporates the tradition into a broader project of theological encyclopaedism.

In addition to his political cachet among Christians, the figure of ʿAlī as a paragon of ascetic virtue had gained wide currency in parts of the Islamicate world by ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime. Accounts of ʿAlī's words and deeds enjoyed a broad readership among Muslims in the later Middle Ages, and not just among Shīʿīs. As Marshall Hodgson has noted, the *Nahj al-balāgha* was treated 'almost as a secondary scripture after the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* even among many Jamāʿī-Sunnis'.[213] 'Alid tendencies also ran strong within Sufi groups, especially those whose masters, *shaykhs* or *pīrs*, traced their spiritual lineage to ʿAlī, regardless of confessional affiliation.[214] In the Ilkhanate, Ghāzān showed a special reverence for descendants of ʿAlī by instituting *dār al-siyādas* (lodging houses for descendants

[209] Ibn Mattā, *Akhbār faṭārikat kursī al-mashriq*, 62. The chronicle of Seert does not mention the formalization of a pact, but states that the Arabs ensured Mār Emmeh's appointment to the catholicosate (*ʿanaw bihi ʿalā ʿaqd al-jathalaqa*) because he had helped them conquer Mosul (*li-annahu ḥamala ilayhim miyaran waqta nuzūlihim ʿalā balad al-Mawṣil li-fatḥihā*); Scher, *Histoire Nestorienne*, 630. Both accounts are discussed in Stephen Gerö, '"Only a Change of Masters?" in Transition Periods in Iranian History', in *Transition Periods in Iranian History. Actes du Symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau (22–24 mai 1985)* (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 43–48, here 46.

[210] Anonymous, *Sharḥ amānat abāʾ majmaʿ Nīqīya*, 1:313.

[211] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, 9: 96–97.

[212] On the Jewish context, see Simcha Gross, 'When the Jews Greeted Ali: Sherira Gaon's Epistle in Light of Arabic and Syriac Historiography', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2017): 122–144. What purports to be a covenant between the Armenian Church and ʿAlī survives in an Armenian translation made in 1767; see Johannes Avdall, 'A Covenant of ʿAli, Fourth Caliph of Baghdad, Granting Certain Immunities and Privileges to the Armenian Nation', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 39, no. 1 (1870): 60–64.

[213] On the pan-confessional popularity of the *Nahj al-balāgha*, see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:38.

[214] For the growth of 'Alid loyalism within Ṣūfī *ṭarīqas* in the later Middle Ages, which helped give Sufism its 'catholic appeal', see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2: 204–220, 462–467. For the significance of groups claiming descent from ʿAlī in earlier Islamicate societies, see Teresa Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids: The First Family of Islam, 750–1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

of the prophet's family) across Mesopotamia and Iran. His brother Öljeitü (r. 1304–1316) continued the practice and would eventually embrace Twelver Shiʿism after having been born a Christian, raised a Buddhist, and converting to Sunni (Ḥanafī then Shāfiʿī) Islam.[215] Given the cultural and political importance of ʿAlidism in this period, it is not difficult to understand why ʿAlī might have been considered a worthy champion of a Christian practice. The story of the clapper's use during the Flood is in essence a Christian one, with no corresponding tradition in any Islamic narrative.[216] What better way, then, to respond to the clapper's marginal status in Islamicate society than to invoke the authority of a figure much revered by Muslims?

Conclusions

It is clear from the foregoing that ʿAbdīshōʿ's exposition of Christian ritual is driven by a need to affirm its doctrinal foundations in an environment that was sometimes at odds with it. As with his Trinitarian and Christological thought, his apology for the Cross is heavily indebted to earlier writers, who were likewise faced with an ever-present need to respond to Muslim challenges. This indebtedness reflects a continuous tradition of literary apologetics that had been in development since some of the earliest Muslim–Christian encounters. ʿAbdīshōʿs principal contribution was to frame such apologies in a vocabulary that reflected the broader discourses of his day, and to weave them into compendious works of theology. Where the Cross is concerned, this has been most evident in his use of terms resonant with currents of Islamic theology. The same can be said of ʿAbdīshōʿ's discourse on the Cross's cosmological significations, which served as a common frame of reference for both Muslim and Christian religious thinkers.[217]

Yet in addition to negotiating commonalities with adjacent doctrines, it was equally important in ʿAbdīshōʿ's didactic scheme to maintain difference. As a religion with its own historical foundations and narratives, it was necessary to remind Christians of the Church's own sacred traditions—most of which predated

[215] The socio-political implications of Ilkhanid patronage of the *dār al-siyādas* has recently been discussed by Judith Pfeiffer, 'Confessional Ambiguity', 143–150.

[216] Despite certain aspects of the Flood narrative found both in Islamic and Syriac Christian traditions, such as the landing of the Ark in Mt al-Jūdī in the Qurʾan (= Qardū in the Peshitta bible), the story of Noah's use of the clapper has no Islamic equivalent, despite its being known by some Muslim writers. For Noah in the Qurʾan, prophetic *ḥadīth*, medieval Qurʾanic exegesis, and the *qiṣas al-anbīyāʾ* genre, see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*, tr. Michael Robertson (Richmond: Curzon, 2002).

[217] In the case of micro- and macrocosmic theories of man and the universe, Johannes van den Heijer and Paulo La Spisa ('La migration du savoir', 63) have described this phenomenon as 'la migration du savoir entre peuples, langues, régions, mais aussi entre communautés voisines' ('the migration of knowledge between peoples, languages, regions, but also between neighbouring communities').

the advent of Islam—and their relevance to ritual worship. At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that Christian communities in the Islamicate world exhibited difference through visible and audible signs of religious practice. In support of this differentiation, ʿAbdīshōʿ shows how these Christian practices and their underpinning narratives, marginalized though they were, could be presented as wholly reasonable in light of repeated critiques. Such concerns clearly manifest in his discussion of the call to prayer in a direct appeal to Islamic wisdom literature and elements of Arabic poetry. Now, it may well be the case that the integration of ʿAlī's sermon into the *Durra*'s discourse on the clapper was due to ʿAbdīshōʿ's admiration for his eloquence and spiritual exemplarity, which he saw as consonant with his own Church's teachings. It is just as likely that his use of the source was intended to negotiate a shared language of ritual piety to justify the striking of the clapper to co-religionists who might be convinced otherwise.

General Conclusion

A Tapestry Woven From Many Cloths

At the beginning of this study, I set out to establish the cultural, intellectual, and religious importance of the apologetic tradition among Syriac and Arabic Christian communities in the medieval Middle East. It is clear that ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā wrote his anti-Muslim apologies with a vast, centuries-long wealth of tradition behind him. He composed these works between 1297/8 and 1313, at a time of increasing religious tension following the official conversion of the Mongols to Islam. While this gradual hardening of official attitudes towards Christians may have informed ʿAbdīshōʿ's work, we have also observed that his theology belongs to a broader genre of apologetics that had been in continuous development since at least the eighth century. Its purpose was twofold: to disseminate the fundaments of Christian doctrine to an internal audience while assuring them that their beliefs were justified in the face of repeated criticism.

Thus, the genre of ʿAbdīshōʿ's apologetics was a long established one, forged over centuries in response to—and in conversation with—Muslims and Jews in the Islamicate world. This does not mean that ʿAbdīshōʿ necessarily entertained any hope that his works would reach Muslims and alter their attitudes. Although some Muslim and Jewish polemicists did indeed read Christian apologies, their perceptions of Christian doctrine remained persistently adverse. What we find instead in both Christian apologetics and anti-Christian polemics is a faithfulness to genre whereby the same accusations, counter-accusations, and rebuttals are rehearsed by representatives of each side. However, this fact should not take away from the broader significance of these texts for the study of Christianity and the history of religions more broadly. As we have seen throughout this study, apologetic compendia served as didactic primers through which Christians in the medieval Islamicate world articulated their religious worldviews. As such, the Syriac and Christian Arabic apologetic traditions should be seen as one of the ways in which Christian communities under Muslim rule achieved and maintained stable canons of doctrine. This 'comprehensive body of apologetics', as Mark Swanson once called it[1], was central to the very persistence of Christianity in Islamicate societies,

[1] Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ', 144. Swanson refers specifically to the body of apologetics for the Crucifixion and the veneration of the Cross. However, the term also applies to the breadth of Syriac and Christian Muslim apologetics as a whole.

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providing the likes of ʿAbdīshōʿ with an intellectual frame of reference to negotiate and uphold a distinct theological identity. Thus, historians wishing to know more about ecclesiastical scholarship in the medieval Middle East need only look at the vast corpus of *summa* literature that existed in ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime and to which he himself contributed.

The preponderance of anti-Muslim apologetics among Christians was matched only by refutations of Christianity common to works of Islamic theology. Throughout this book we have noted several works of Muslim *kalām* that incorporate refutations of other religions into their general expositions of Islamic doctrine. As such, the development of Syriac and Christian Arabic apologetics—especially those that took the form of theological compendia—ran in parallel with the development of anti-Christian refutations by Muslims. This should prompt us to think about the entangled confessional identities that underlay the practice of theology in the medieval Islamicate world. For Muslim and Christian traditions were in frequent conversation with one another, irrespective of whether such conversations took place in the form of 'live' or 'physical' exchanges (indeed, in many cases they did not). For Christians living in Islamicate lands during ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime, it was virtually impossible to read any systematic work of theology without the presence of a Muslim interlocutor, real or imagined. Thus, the theological identity of the Church of the East and adjacent Christian communities was shaped as much by contacts with Islam as it was by its earlier, pre-Islamic past.

Anti-Muslim apologetics were thus integral to the Church of the East's literary output, before, during, and (just as importantly) after ʿAbdīshōʿ's lifetime. ʿAbdīshōʿ was by no means the originator of the genre but was nevertheless among its most significant representatives. A testament to our author's accomplishments as a theologian is the literary afterlife of his works. In Chapter 1 we briefly noted the impact of his *Nomocanon* on the development of East Syrian canon law, as well as the influence of his *Catalogue* on early European orientalism. But what I hope to have achieved is a finer appreciation of dogmatic works like his *Pearl*, which later served as an authoritative handbook of Nestorian dogma well into the twentieth century. In this important catechism we have observed an anti-Muslim undercurrent, which is further reflected in his *Durra* and *Farāʾid*, two later *summae* written in Arabic. Analysing their apologetic themes has revealed the central role played by inter-religious controversy in articulating Christian belonging in a multi-religious environment. That these apologetic themes are also reflected in a brief Arabic sermon by ʿAbdīshōʿ is further indication of just how embedded anti-Muslim apologetics were in the Church's catechetical enterprise. Indeed, ʿAbdīshōʿ's impact could already be felt during his lifetime when a priest named Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā al-Mawṣilī copied his *Khuṭba* in 1315. Almost two decades later, having relocated to Cyprus, Ṣalībā incorporated other works by ʿAbdīshōʿ into a theological anthology, the *Sirr al-asrār*. In this work, ʿAbdīshōʿ takes pride of place alongside other important East Syrian writers like Elias bar

Shennāyā, Elias ibn al-Muqlī, and Īshōʿyahb bar Malkōn—all of whom participated in interreligious apologetics.

I also hope to have illustrated the importance of Christian apologetics to the study of Islamicate intellectual history more broadly. It should be apparent by now that ʿAbdīshōʿ's theology cannot be approached in any meaningful way without taking into account its rootedness in a broader matrix of genres, literatures, and intellectual traditions. One way of understanding this interculturality has been through the lens of Marshall Hodgson's category of 'Islamicate', that is, something which does not pertain to Islam as a faith but is nevertheless situated within a shared cultural, linguistic, and literary frame of reference.[2] The site of this shared frame of reference was the Arabic language, which provided Jews, Christians, and Muslims with a 'cultural *koinē*' that brought their respective traditions into contact with one another.[3] Examples discussed in this study have included ʿAbdīshōʿ's frequent use of Avicennan locutions for God, together with terms resonant with Muʿtazilite ideas about the obligatory nature of God's justice and the necessity of His providence.

ʿAbdīshōʿ also brings Arabic models of poetry and storytelling to bear on Christian doctrine—despite his rhetorical disavowal of the *maqāmāt* genre in his Syriac magnum opus, the *Paradise of Eden*. His analogies for the Incarnation are rooted in the Antiochene Christological tradition. But in one instance he creatively repackages them in verses of Arabic wine poetry more commonly cited in Sufi (and anti-Sufi) contexts to describe the state of ecstatic union between the gnostic and God. In employing these verses, ʿAbdīshōʿ does not attempt to concede ground to any Muslim notion of divine union. Rather, he illustrates a Christian understanding of the concept, which, though unacceptable to many Muslims, could be expressed through the Arabo-Islamic literary conventions of his day. In a similar vein, ʿAbdīshōʿ's telling of the story of Jesus' ministry reflects aspects of the Arabic Bilawhar and Būdhāsaf legend. Where the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ before him sought to extract Islamic meaning from the legend's parable of the wise doctor and the city of the sick, ʿAbdīshōʿ Christianizes the fable in order to reframe his Church's teachings on the Incarnation as divine deception. Thus, the Muslim and Christian Arabic adaptations of this Buddhist legend came to radically different conclusions. In the Islamic context, the wise man's sending signifies Muḥammad's prophetic mission, while in ʿAbdīshōʿ's scheme the wise man is God who sees fit to directly intercede in the affairs of man by assuming human form. These differences notwithstanding, ʿAbdīshōʿ rearticulates the biblical story of Jesus' life in a way that generates renewed meaning and relevance to its central themes.

[2] Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:59. [3] Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad*, [4–6].

A shared idiom also features in ʿAbdīshōʿ's understanding of the church clapper as a call to piety and repentance. Here, we encounter not only a rare convention in Arabic prosody known as *daqq al-nāqūs* but also the figure of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. By invoking the authority of a much-revered Muslim figure, ʿAbdīshōʿ demonstrates to his Christian readers that the striking of the clapper in times of prayer could be legitimized according to Islamic authorities as well as his Church's own sacred traditions, namely those deriving from the *Cave of Treasures*. More importantly, ʿAbdīshōʿ shows that analogues of Christian piety could be found in Islamic models. As our author would have it, ʿAlī's poetic sermon about the church clapper speaks directly to the themes of repentance and continence present in the *Cave of Treasure*'s Flood narrative. Such themes are present elsewhere in ʿAbdīshōʿ's oeuvre, particularly in his Syriac *Paradise of Eden*. A poem from this work speaks of the fleeting nature of the world's vanities in terms that chime with *ubi sunt* and *momento mori* themes from Arabic poetry. ʿAbdīshōʿ's shared literary space, then, transcends linguistic as well as confessional boundaries.

Admittedly, my definition of 'apologetics' has at times been broad. But what I hope to have illustrated is just how interdependent the categories of 'apology' and 'polemic' were. A case in point has been ʿAbdīshōʿ's discussion of other Christian confessions. His *Pearl*, which otherwise reflects many Muslim objections to Christianity, is adamant in its rejection of the Jacobites and Melkites positions on Christ's natures. A key theme that emerges here is Christological self-definition, which ʿAbdīshōʿ expresses through what I have referred to as a 'church-historical approach'. This is to say, he explains to an East Syrian readership how their current theological identity was shaped by events at Ephesus and Chalcedon in the fifth century. In doing so, he systematically lays out a set of arguments and presuppositions from late antique and earlier medieval Nestorian writers who polemicized against the Jacobites and Melkites for conflating Christ's natures and *qnōmē*. Another example of the interface between polemics and apologetics comes from ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Profession*. Once again, he inherits the language of earlier East Syrian theologians such as Theodore bar Kōnī and Elias bar Shennāyā, the latter of whom sought to convince a Muslim interlocutor that it was the Nestorians alone who espoused a Christology that was in greater accord with monotheism than those of rival confessions. This intra-Christian rivalry had long characterized the articulation of East Syrian Christology in Arabic. Later in life, however, ʿAbdīshōʿ would skilfully mediate this textual tradition in a way that was no longer hostile to other Christians. In his *Durra* and *Farāʾid*, his sole purpose appears to be the justification of Christian doctrine against mainly Muslim objections—for which, perhaps, he no longer deemed it necessary to attack Christians of other confessions. The evolution in his method of exposition thus points to a hitherto overlooked dynamism and complexity in ʿAbdīshōʿ's thought and in the genre of Christian Arabic apologetics more generally.

Before ending, we would do well to think about how the material presented in this book might benefit future studies in Christianity and Islam. In the area of the former, we have observed the paramount importance of the Arabic language, alongside Syriac, in the historical formation of Christianity in the Middle East. But when we envision the Syriac Christian tradition, so rarely do we think of it as being more than the sum of the Syriac language. Just as the Islamic world encompasses a matrix of cultures and languages beyond Arabic and Arab identity, so too was Syriac Christianity characterized by a multilingualism and interculturality that is only beginning to be appreciated. Beginning in about the ninth century, various representatives of the East and West Syrian Churches wrote copious tracts of theology in the Arabic language. As such, we must begin to understand this Arabic-language inheritance as being an integral part of the very tapestry of Christianity itself—a tapestry that was woven from many cloths (as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.7). Rather than essentialize world Christianities into linguistic and cultural units (Syriac, Arabic, Coptic, etc.), it is useful to understand the many identities at play in any given author's works. ʿAbdīshōʿ's rhetorical insistence on the superiority of Syriac over Arabic did not prevent him from writing multiple works in the latter, both theological (in the case of his apologetics) and liturgical (in the case of his *Rhymed Gospels*). For just as thirteenth-century Christians were exposed to the liturgy in Arabic, so too did they *read* about their churches' theological inheritance in Arabic. One way of problematizing this diglossia has been to conceive of Syriac and Arabic as two competing yet co-existing cosmopoleis, albeit ones of unequal social standing.[4] In his preface to the *Paradise of Eden*, ʿAbdīshōʿ views the former cosmopolis—Syriac—as having been significantly undermined by the hegemonic status of the latter—Arabic—and thus a restorationist agenda lay at the heart of his enterprise. And yet ʿAbdīshōʿ's misapprehension towards the Arabic language did not prevent him from drawing on its literary genres in order to express the central tenets of his faith. This should prompt modern historians and theologians to reflect on the benefits of integrating Arabic sources into the study of Christianity more broadly. Doing so helps us better appreciate how different theological canons were constructed by ʿAbdīshōʿ and others like him. For example, while we might think of the Cappadocians as foundational to Christianity, for many medieval Syriac and Christian Arabic writers such thinkers also included Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib, and Elias bar Shennāyā.

As for future directions in Islamic Studies (broadly conceived), one hopes that researchers and teachers in the field continue to integrate non-Muslim sources into their work. Between the eighth and fourteenth centuries, the evolution and systematization of Syriac and Christian Arabic theology was coeval with that of

[4] For the term 'cosmopolis' as denoting a dominant literary and epistemic space, see Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, 10–36, discussed in the present study, Chapter 1, Section 1.6.

Muslim *kalām* (though the origins of the former considerably predate the latter). Thus, religious differences notwithstanding, Muslims and Christians participated in shared modes of knowledge production. The locus of this production was the Arabic language, an intellectual lingua franca that gave rise to a commonwealth of 'texts, ideas, and concerns [which] were fully shared and discussed [...] by philosophers and scientists hailing from different religious communities'.[5] As an author (and possibly practitioner) of Arabic alchemy, ʿAbdīshōʿ was certainly attentive to these shared scientific concerns. But as we have seen in this book, such concerns also included the unity of God, the theology of divine attributes, free will, and the teleological nature of God's actions. A closer integration of different sources, traditions, and perspectives can surely give us a fuller picture of how intellectuals in the medieval Islamicate world approached these problems.

A further theme in this book has been the origin and development of religious traditions. Historians have long been captivated by formative phases and origins at the expense of later developments. As I stated at the beginning of this book, such approaches have arguably played down the importance of such 'post-formative' authors as ʿAbdīshōʿ. I would urge scholars to not be discouraged from studying Syriac and Christian Arabic authors who wrote in later periods. I believe that I have uncovered truly noteworthy features of ʿAbdīshōʿ's thought that would have otherwise gone unnoticed were we to instead focus our intellectual and institutional energies on earlier periods, be they late antique or early Islamic. This has been achieved by looking past these prejudices to better historicize ʿAbdīshōʿ's project on its own epistemological, theological, and literary terms. With that said, my study has offered but a glimpse into ʿAbdīshōʿ's oeuvre. Many more apologetic themes in his works have yet to be explored, such as the veracity of the Christian scriptures, the veneration of icons, the abrogation of Mosaic Law, circumcision, baptism, monogamous marriage—to say nothing of the many other authors who remain unstudied by historians of Christianity and Islam alike.

[5] Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad*, [6–7].

APPENDIX

ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Summae*

An Overview of Contents

The following is a synoptic table of contents of ʿAbdīshōʿ's *Pearl*, *Durra*, and *Farāʾid*. I have listed all sections and subsections as they occur in their editions. Where editions are missing chapter headings, I have substituted them with my own (in square brackets), or with recourse to other manuscripts. I have also divided headings into theoretical principles (e.g., the Trinity and Incarnation) and principles of practice (e.g., veneration of the Cross), as understood and explained by ʿAbdīshōʿ himself.[1]

***Pearl* (ed. De Kelaita, 1922)**	***Durra* (ed. Gianazza, 2018)**	***Farāʾid* (ed. Gianazza, 2018)**
	[Theoretical Principles]	
***Mēmrā* 1: Discourse on God** Ch. 1: That there is a God. Ch. 2: That He is one and not many. Ch. 3: On His eternity. Ch. 4: On His incomprehensibility. Ch. 5: On the Trinity.	*Bāb* 1: On the truth of the Gospel and the authenticity of Christ's coming. *Bāb* 2: Prophecies concerning Christ and proof that they are fulfilled by him. *Bāb* 3: Necessity of the abrogation of Mosaic law and the impossibility of the abrogation of our law. *Bāb* 4: On oneness and threeness. *Bāb* 5: On indwelling and uniting. *Bāb* 6: On the dates confirming the economy of the saviour. *Bāb* 7: On baptism.	*Faṣl* 1: Prologue: That Christianity is the truth; the coming of Christ is true; and the Gospel is authentic. *Faṣl* 2: On what is common to all religions and what the people of [all] religious communities never cease to affirm. *Faṣl* 3: On the principles in which Christians believe, transmitted to the Orthodox Creed taken from scripture and the words of the apostles. *Faṣl* 4: On the three principles: that the world is temporally originated, that it has an originator who is the Creator (may He be exalted), and that He is one. *Faṣl* 5: On oneness and threeness. *Faṣl* 6: On indwelling and uniting.
***Mēmrā* 2: Discourse on Creation** Ch. 1: On the creation of the world. Ch. 2: On the sin of the first man. Ch. 3: On divine laws and judgements, and on the prophets. Ch. 4: Prophecies concerning Christ.		
***Mēmrā* 3: Discourse on the Christian Dispensation** Ch. 1: The coming of Christ and his uniting. Ch. 2: On the economy of Christ. Ch. 3: On the truth of Christianity.		

[1] See discussion in Chapter 1, Section 1.8.

Pearl (ed. De Kelaita, 1922)	*Durra* (ed. Gianazza, 2018)	*Farāʾid* (ed. Gianazza, 2018)
Ch. 4: On the different confessions. Ch. 5: Refutation of these confessions. Ch. 6: On [the title] 'Mother of God.' Ch. 7: On the quaternity of *qnōmē*. Ch. 8: On the Church.		*Faṣl* 7: On the necessity of the ancient law's abrogation and the impossibility of abrogating the law of our lord Christ. *Faṣl* 8: On resurrection.
	[Principles of Praxis]	
***Mēmrā* 4: Discourse on the Ecclesiastical Sacraments** Ch. 1: Number of ecclesiastical sacraments. Ch. 2: On priesthood. Ch. 3: On baptism. Ch. 4: On the anointing oil. Ch. 5: On the holy Eucharist. Ch. 6: On the holy leaven. Ch. 7: On the absolution of sins and repentance. Ch. 8: On marriage and virginity.	*Bāb* 8: On the Eucharist. *Bāb* 9: On the Cross. *Bāb* 10: On resurrection. *Bāb* 11: On prayer, fasting and almsgiving. *Bāb* 12: On prostration to the east. *Bāb* 13: On the fastening of the girdle. *Bāb* 14: On Sundays. *Bāb* 15: On Wednesdays and Fridays. *Bāb* 16: On the clapper.	*Faṣl* 9: On the Cross. *Faṣl* 10: [On leadership, *viz.* priesthood and its conditions]. *Faṣl* 11: On baptism and the Eucharist. *Faṣl* 12: On acts of worship and what pertains to them. • Fasting. • Prayer. • Ablutions. • The clapper. • Almsgiving.
***Mēmrā* 5: Discourse on those things that signal the world to come** Ch. 1: On prostration to the east. Ch. 2: On veneration of the Lord's Cross. Ch. 3: On the holy day of Sunday. Ch. 4: On Wednesdays. Ch. 5: On fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Ch. 6: On the girdle. Ch. 7: On resurrection and the coming judgement.	*Bāb* 17: On images and music in the Church.[2] *Bāb* 18: [Conclusion:] on the impossibility of the statement that [the Christians] corrupted the Torah and Gospel.	*Faṣl* 13: On the honouring of Sunday and important feast days according to Christians; continence during fasts; Fridays and Wednesdays; monasticism, monogamy, and the prohibition of divorce.

[2] This chapter title (*Fī al-ṣuwar wa-l-alḥān fī al-kanīsa*) is missing from Gianazza's edition and entirely absent in Mosul, Dominican Friars of Mosul 202 (cited elsewhere in this study). It is found in Baghdad, Iraq Syrian Catholic Archdiocese of Baghdad 26 (digitized by Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, project number: ASCBN 26).

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